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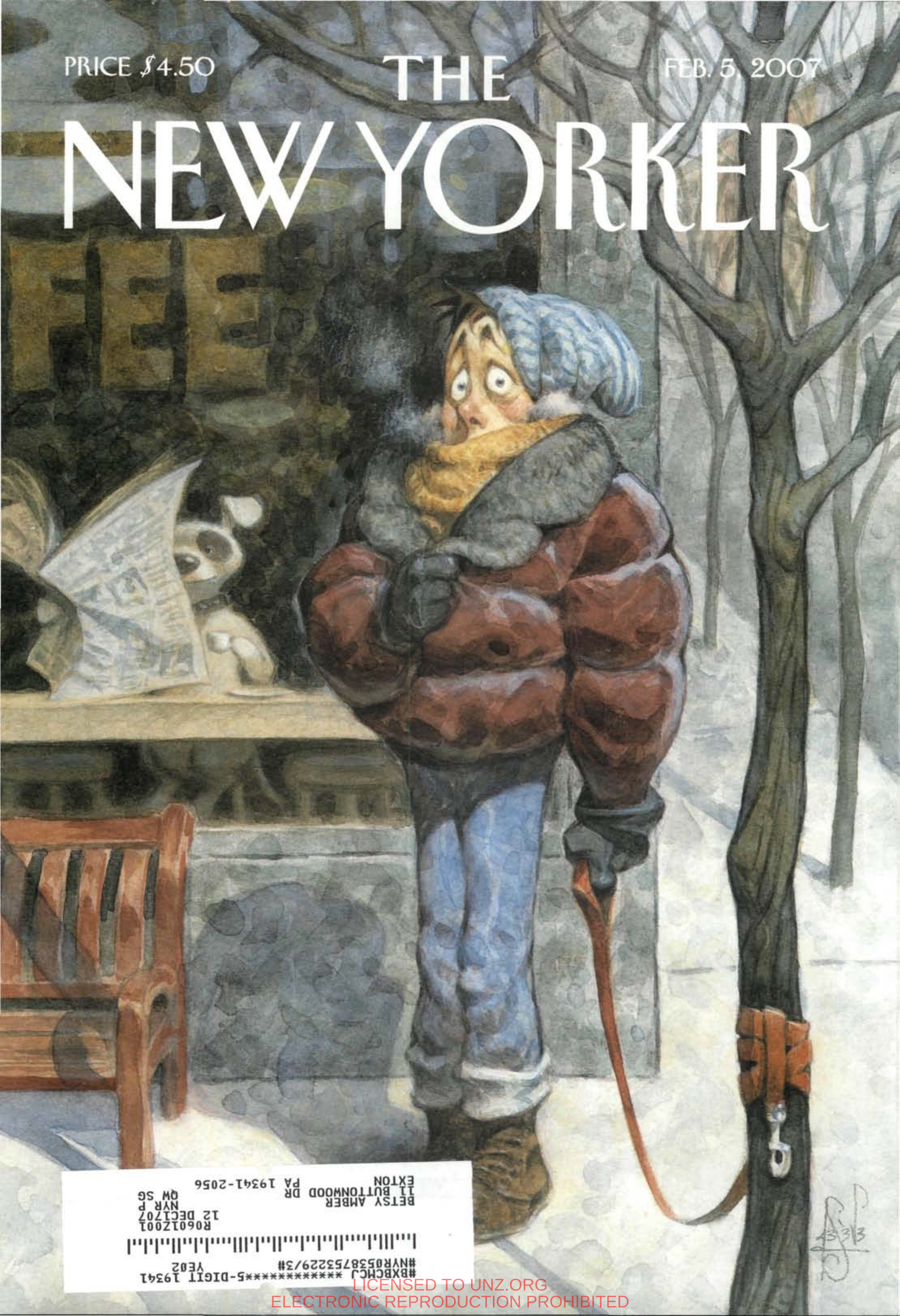

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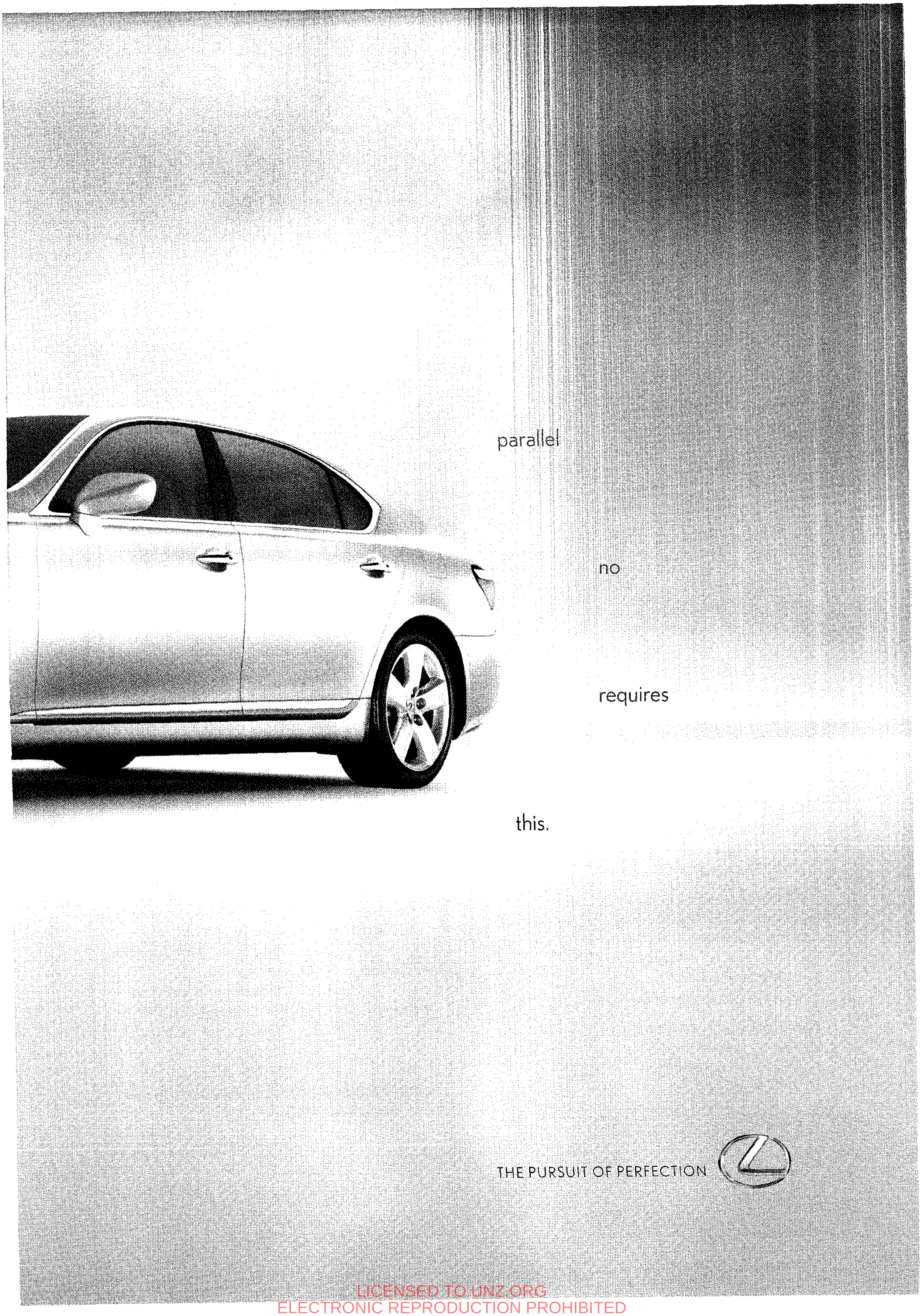
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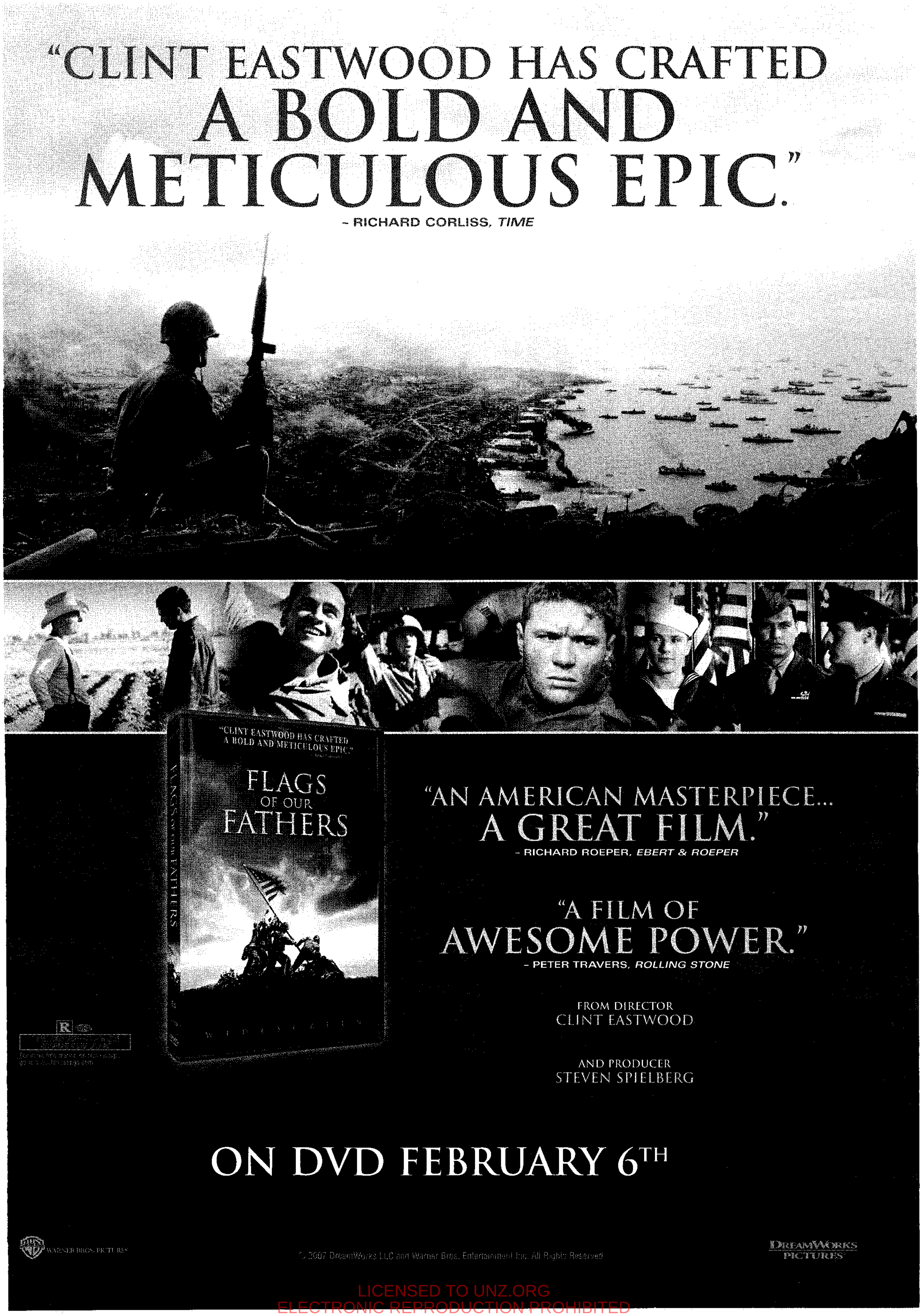
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- PETER TRAVERS, *ROLLING STONE*

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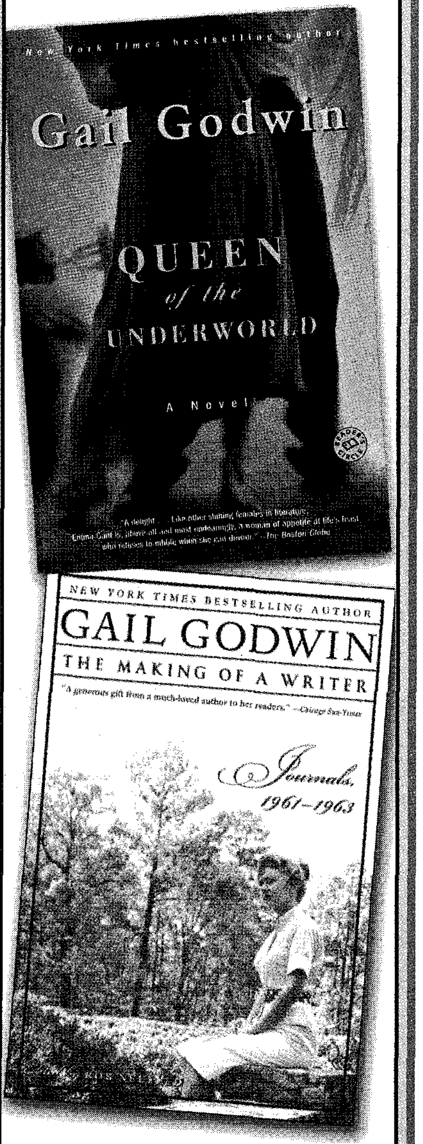

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CONTRIBUTORS

Ryszard Kapuściński ("The Open World," p. 58) was born in Pinsk, Poland, in 1932 and died last week in Warsaw. Despite the strictures of the Communist authorities, he won international acclaim for his accounts of wars and revolutions around the world, especially in Africa and Latin America. His books include "The Emperor," "The Soccer War," "Imperium," and "Travels with Herodotus," due out in June.

Jeffrey Toobin ("Google's Moon Shot," p. 30) is a staff writer and the author of "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court," which comes out in the fall.

Larry Doyle (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 37) will publish his first novel, "I Love You, Beth Cooper," in May.

Alexandra Fuller ("Boomtown Blues," p. 38) is the author of two books, "Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight" and "Scribbling the Cat."

Jon Lee Anderson ("Mr. Big," p. 46) is a staff writer. His books include "The Lion's Grave: Dispatches from Afghanistan" and "The Fall of Baghdad."

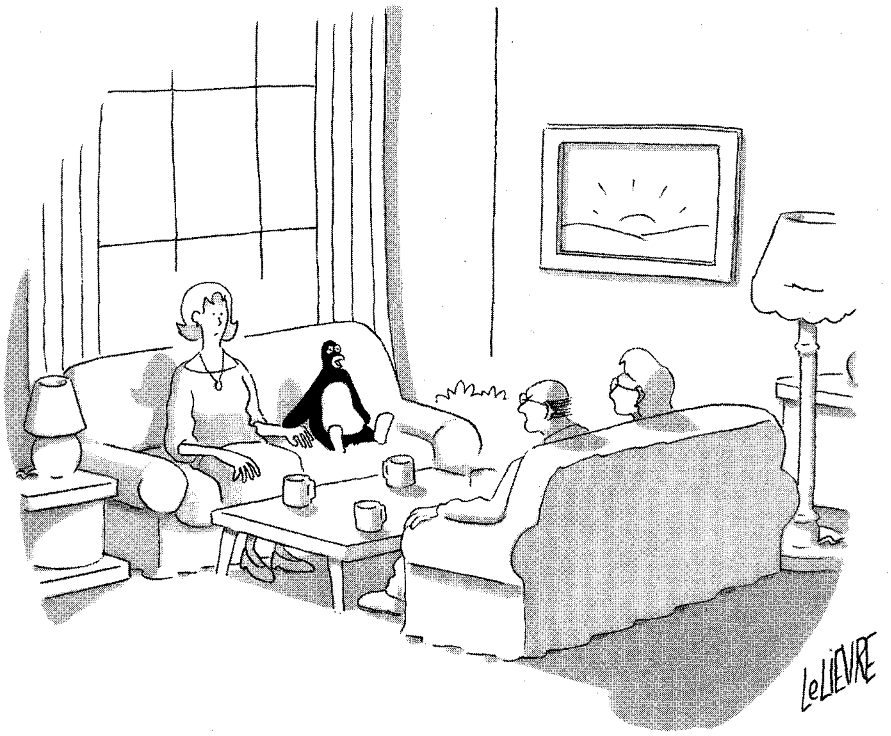
David Foster Wallace (Fiction, p. 66) is the author of, most recently, "Consider the Lobster," a collection of essays, and "Oblivion," a book of stories.

Peter Schjeldahl (Books, p. 70) is the magazine's art critic.

Eliza Griswold (Poem, p. 73) reported on Waziristan for the magazine in 2004. Her début collection of poems, "Wideawake Field," will be published in May.

Paul Goldberger (The Sky Line, p. 83) holds the Joseph Urban Chair in Design and Architecture at the New School.

Peter de Sève (Cover) is currently designing characters for upcoming animated films. ♦



"Actually, I prefer the term Arctic-American."

THE MAIL

GETTING IT WRONG

Nicholas Lemann's one-paragraph distillation of the Lewis Libby trial contained an unusual number of dubious assertions: that Joseph Wilson was dispatched by "the White House" to Niger to find proof that Niger "had shipped yellowcake . . . to Iraq" (he was sent by the C.I.A.), that he published his *Times* Op-Ed piece "five months" after his return (it was a year and five months), that the exposure of Valerie Plame as a C.I.A. operative was "unlawful" (why wasn't Richard Armitage, who was known to the special prosecutor as the person responsible for this disclosure, charged with an unlawful act?), and that the search for evidence to discredit Wilson led to the disclosure of Plame's identity (Comment, January 29th). These, however, are only quibbles compared with the assertion that our invasion of Iraq has "degraded" our ability to confront the threat represented by Iran. If Lemann can make a cogent argument that placing sizable and effective military forces on either side (Iraq and Afghanistan) of the Islamic Republic degrades our ability to confront it, he should take up duties at the National War College.

James Currin
Stamford, Conn.

WAR AND INTERNATIONALISM

Jeffrey Goldberg, in his piece on the way that Iraq has become a test for the leading Democratic Presidential candidates, describes Evan Bayh's worry that "Iraq is turning some Democrats away from the Party's internationalist tradition" ("The Starting Gate," January 15th). Bayh's main evidence for this seems to be the fact that his "fairly hawkish" views on Iraq make him an unattractive Presidential candidate. Neither Bayh nor Goldberg appears to see the difference between militarism and internationalism. Was it internationalist of President Bush to go to war in Iraq without the approval of the United Nations and in spite of worldwide opposition? True internationalists support international law, stronger international institutions, and respect for the opinions of people throughout the world. Opposing the war in Iraq is an expression of internationalist values, not a repudiation of them. It is Bush who has consistently been anti-internationalist, insisting in his 2004 State of the Union address that he would never seek a "permission slip" from any world body to do whatever he wanted.

Stephen Nathanson
Professor of Philosophy
Northeastern University
Boston, Mass.

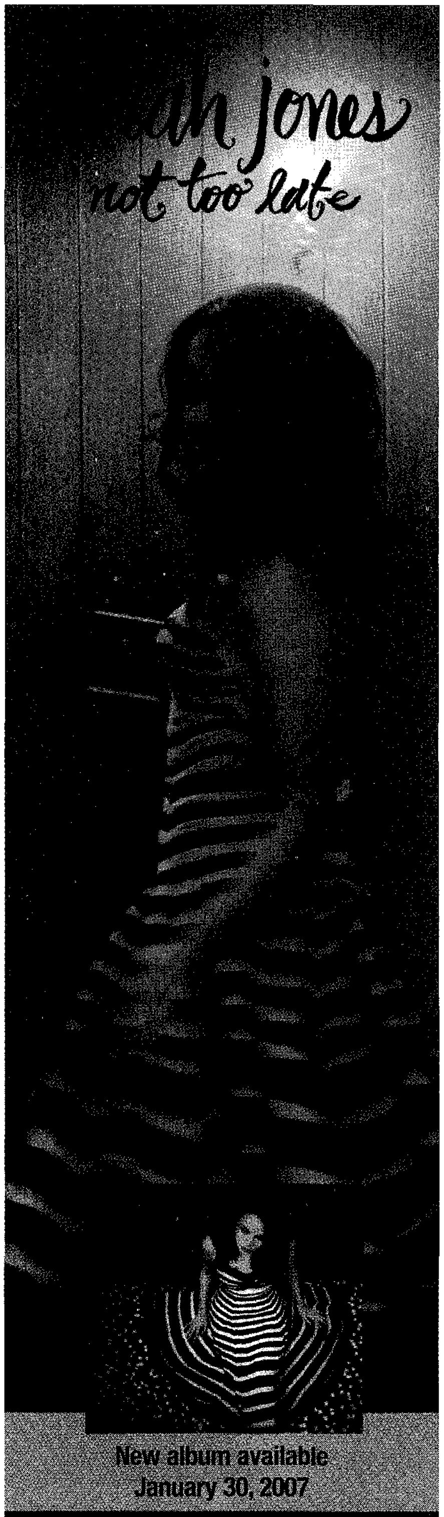
THE WAY IT WAS

Katherine Boo's portrait of school reform in Denver overlooks the fact that Manual High School was, not so long ago, one of the best high schools in the state ("Expectations," January 15th). When I attended Manual, in the early nineteen-nineties, the school was home each year to an impressive number of National Merit Scholars and Ivy League entrants. Manual also had one of the best sports programs in Colorado, with a basketball team that had collected eleven state championships (more than any other Colorado high school). In those days, the school was still under a federally mandated busing order (which ended in 1995, although busing continued until 1997). This system brought in kids from more affluent neighborhoods to mix (not always easily) with the predominantly African-American student population drawn from the local community. There were also kids like me, from working-class, mixed-race families (my father is Hispanic and my mother Anglo), and together we made Manual a case study in successful integration.

Rebecca Guerin
Cincinnati, Ohio

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.



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A walking, talking Albert Einstein robot at the Cooper-Hewitt's "Design Life Now." Photograph by Brian Finke.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE

UPTOWNERS

Washington Heights, one of the last frontiers of gentrification in Manhattan, is the subject of a new musical, "In the Heights," by Lin-Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes. The story is set at a bodega, and the score includes hip-hop, salsa, merengue, and pop. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE

VISIONARIES

The former Talking Heads front man, David Byrne, brings a few of his favorite performers to various theatres at Carnegie Hall for a four-day festival this week. A highlight is the "Welcome to Dreamland" show, on Friday night, in which a multigenerational cast of experimental folk artists—including Adem, Devendra Banhart, Vashti Bunyan, Cibelle, CocoRosie, and Vetiver—will bring their songs to the main concert hall. (See page 10.)

ART

IN TRANSIT

The Whitney Museum's gallery in the Altria Building, across the street from Grand Central Terminal, is an airy urban oasis. The current show on exhibit there, "Burgeoning Geometries," features constructions by Tara Donovan, Phoebe Washburn, Jane South, Charles Goldman, and others. (See page 12.)

MOVIES

SOUNDS ON-SCREEN

Moving Image offers a weekend of music documentaries whose subjects range from punk ("X: The Unheard Music") to Stephen Sondheim ("Original Cast Album—Company"). Also featured are "East Side Story," about musicals from behind the Iron Curtain, and "Jazz on a Summer's Day," about the 1958 Newport festival. (See page 21.)

READINGS AND TALKS

STRONG IS HIS HOLD

The American poet Galway Kinnell turns eighty this week, and a birthday celebration will take place at the Great Hall at Cooper Union, featuring Robert Bly, Mark Doty, Marie Howe, Sharon Olds, and a number of other writers. (See page 22.)

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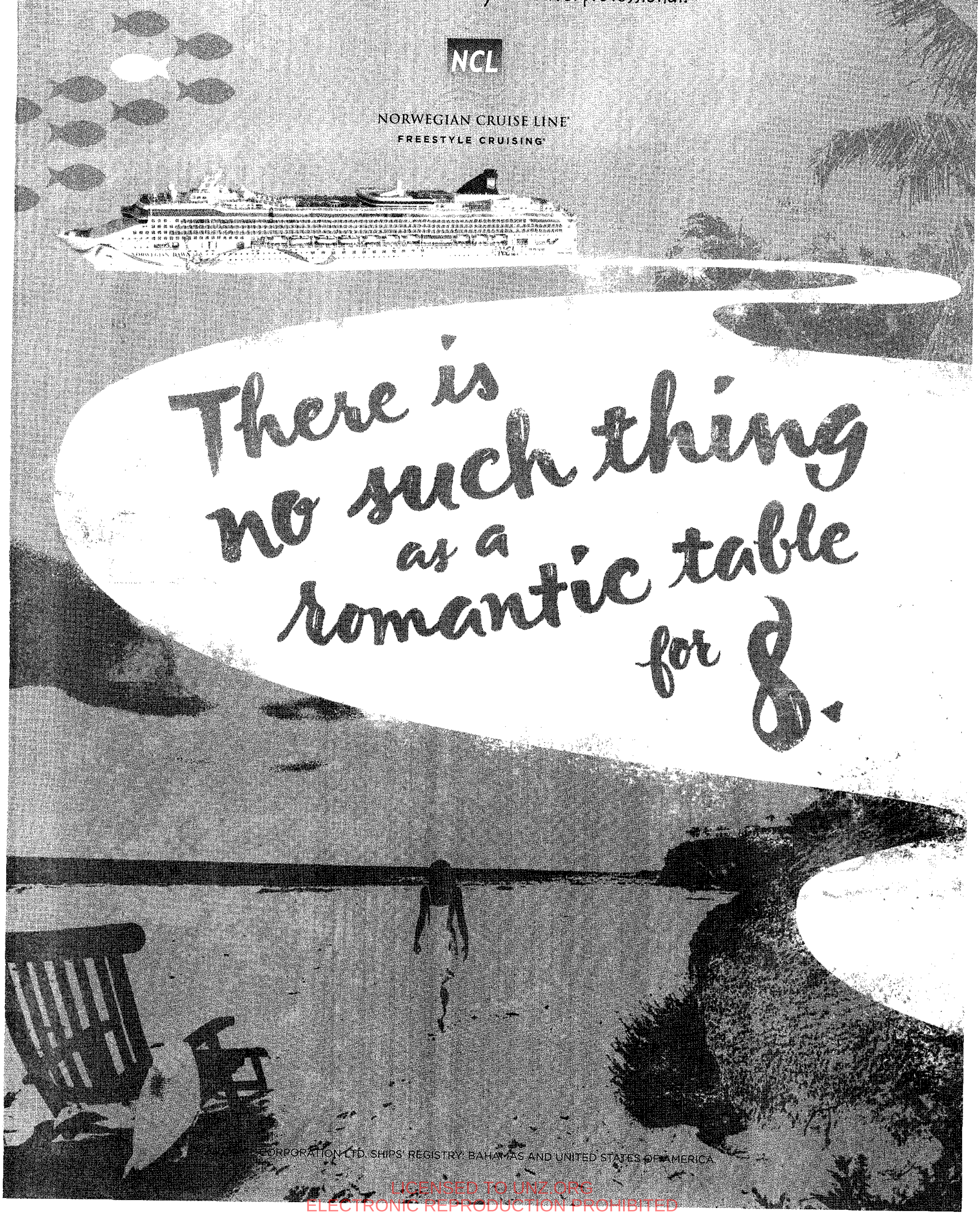
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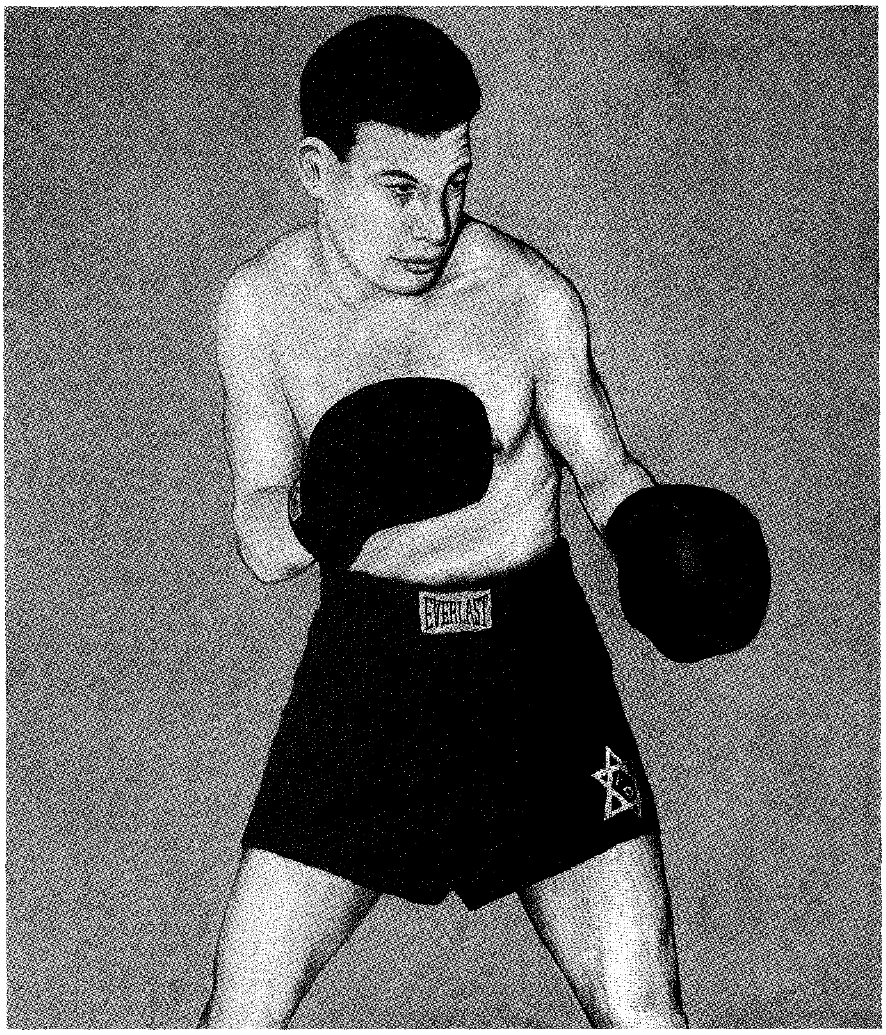


Charles Miller's paintings of Jewish boxers are at Think Tank 3, on Hudson Street.

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ABSOLUTE CLARITY
Sophia Romma transfers Edvard Radzinsky's 1977 play from its original Russian setting to the present-day Lower East Side. In previews. Opens Feb. 2. (Players Theatre, 115 Macdougal St. 212-352-3101.)

ADRIFT IN MACAO
Primary Stages presents a musical parody of film noir, with a book and lyrics by the seasoned absurdist Christopher Durang and music by Peter Melnick. Sheryl Kaller directs. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

ALL THAT I WILL EVER BE
The world première of a new play by Alan Ball ("Six Feet Under"), about the relationship between a Los Angeles native and a Middle Eastern immigrant. Directed by Jo Bonney. In previews. Opens Feb. 6. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART THREE: SALVAGE
The final installment of Tom Stoppard's tripartite Russian epic. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

THE FRUGAL REPAST
Ron Hirsen's play, directed by Joe Grifasi, is about two Parisian clowns who steal a Picasso print after discovering that they are its subjects. In previews. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

GONE
The postmodern auteur Charles L. Mee, Jr., draws on texts by Proust and Ginsberg for his new movement-theatre piece. Opens Feb. 1. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

HOWARD KATZ
Patrick Marber's dark comedy stars Alfred Molina as a high-powered talent agent whose life is falling apart. Doug Hughes directs. Previews begin Feb. 2. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

IN THE HEIGHTS
The ethnic mix of Washington Heights is the focus of this new musical, with music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda and a book by Quiara Alegría Hudes. In previews. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE JEW OF MALTA / THE MERCHANT OF VENICE
Theatre for a New Audience presents Christopher Marlowe's play and its Shakespearean counterpart in repertory, with F. Murray Abraham as their respective Jewish villains, Barabas and Shylock. In previews. Opens Feb. 4. (Duke, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LAST WORD . . .
In this drama by Oren Safdie, Daniel J. Travanti plays a Holocaust survivor who enlists a headstrong N.Y.U. student as his writing assistant. In previews. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE MADRAS HOUSE
The Mint Theatre Company revives Harley Granville-Barker's comedy from 1909, not seen in New York since 1921. Previews begin Jan. 31. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

MARAT/SADE
Peter Weiss's haunting play within a play is the second entry in the Classical Theatre of Harlem's season. Directed by Christopher McElroen. Previews begin Feb. 2. (H.S.A. Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave. 212-868-4444.)

MARY ROSE
A revival of J. M. Barrie's classic romantic drama, about a girl who may be a ghost. Tina Landau directs. Previews begin Feb. 1. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

THE SECRET OF MME. BONNARD'S BATH
In Israel Horovitz's play, presented by New York Playwrights Lab, two art students discover the hidden story behind a painting by Pierre Bonnard. Previews begin Feb. 3. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A SPANISH PLAY
John Turturro directs Zoe Caldwell and Denis O'Hare in the English-language première of Yasmina Reza's new work, which takes place at a theatre rehearsal. In previews. Opens Feb. 1. (Classic Stage, 136 E. 13th St. 212-677-4210.)

A VERY COMMON PROCEDURE
MCC Theatre presents a play by Courtney Baron, about an affair between a married woman and her infant's doctor. Michael Greif directs. Previews begin Jan. 31. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

AT LEAST IT'S PINK
Loud and crude yet winningly warm, Bridget Everett is an odd hybrid: one part foulmouthed, buxom comedienne, one part Oprah. In her new cabaret show, deftly directed by Michael Patrick King ("Sex and the City"), Everett coaxes laughs from the mean corners of the lonely city: a restaurant kitchen, an Internet-generated one-night stand. In two sets of clever songs (which she co-wrote with Kenny Mellman, of Kiki & Herb), she hits notes of brassy hilarity, but her recurring jokes about being fat and having abortions—and a handful of confessional ballads—send the tone veering into uncomfortable pathos. This dame can definitely work a room, but, as she freely admits, she doesn't know when to stop. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

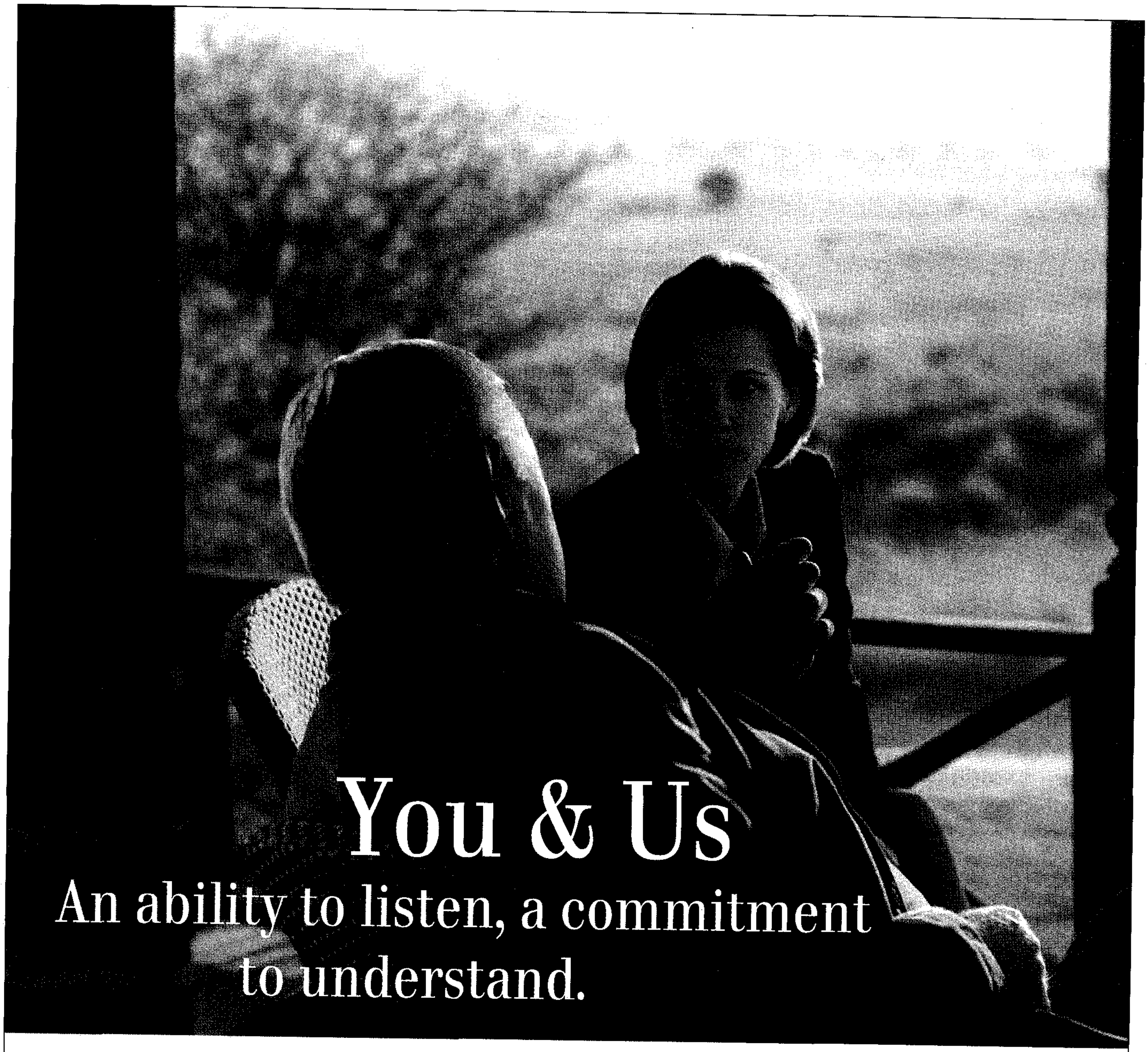
DUTCHMAN
A revival of Amiri Baraka's 1964 race drama. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-989-2020.)

THE FEVER
Wallace Shawn plays a man of privilege who is forced to confront the poverty of the Third World, in the New Group's revival of his one-person drama. Scott Elliott directs. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

FRANK'S HOME
A new play by Richard Nelson ("James Joyce's The Dead") explores Frank Lloyd Wright's troubled family life. Robert Falls directs. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

MUST DON'T WHIP 'UM
In this follow-up to her 2004 hit "Accidental Nostalgia," the alt-country vocalist Cynthia Hopkins stages a high-tech concert topped with several layers of theatrical contrivance. We are at the farewell performance of Cameron Seymour, an almost famous nineteen-seventies singer who has decided to give up the spotlight and join a Sufi brotherhood in Morocco. Between songs, footage is shown from a documentary by Seymour's daughter, who is haunted years later by the absence of her free-spirited mother. If the show's meta-narratives don't align convincingly, it's in part because Hopkins, who has cast herself as an object of mystery, is too grounded a performer to play the sphinx. With her plaintive, honest balladry, she's as disarmingly present as a missing person can get. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Through Feb. 4.)

ONCE THERE WAS A VILLAGE
Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre tells the multigenerational story of immigrant life in the East Village, drawing on Yuri Kapralov's book of the same name. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)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THE POLISH PLAY
There's no shortage of low-budget ingenuity fuelling this cheeky mélange of Shakespeare's "Macbeth" and Alfred Jarry's scatological satire "Ubu Roi," which ignited public pandemonium when it first appeared, in 1896. Jarry's play had only two performances then, and it still stands as a gird to polite sensibilities. It's also a fun-house mirroring of the story of Macbeth, whom Jarry transformed into a flatulent buffoon (Jordan Gelber) saddled with a slatternly wife (Dana Smith-Croll) and royalist ambitions. In this puppet-rich production, the director Henry Wishcamper offers up a merry porridge of Shakespeare's iambs besmirched with Jarry's fecal obsessions—the discordant whole enlivened by a nimble cast. (Walker Space, 46 Walker St. 212-868-4444.)

TRANSLATIONS
Manhattan Theatre Club revives Brian Friel's drama from 1980, about an Irish town contending with the forces of cultural imperialism. Garry Hynes directs. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

VICTORIA MARTIN: MATH TEAM QUEEN
Kathryn Walat's play, presented by the Women's Project, is about a popular high-school girl who learns to love her inner mathlete. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

WAKE UP MR. SLEEPY!
YOUR UNCONSCIOUS MIND IS DEAD!
Richard Foreman's latest dispatch was inspired, he says, by a recent trip to the planet Ax-e-tron. What he saw on Ax-e-tron was apparently reminiscent of his previous work: here is the familiar assemblage of spooky scenery (a gaggle of baby dolls flying a plane, mannequins in black veils), cryptic mantras, and stone-faced actors in goth attire. A series of video projections, shot at a Portuguese mental hospital, overlook the playing area. The show's central theme—the death of the unconscious in the modern world, as it relates to the invention of air travel—is hashed out in dialectical fashion, and with all the exuberant mournfulness that Foreman and his willing cast can deliver. (Ontological Theatre at St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101.)

Also Playing

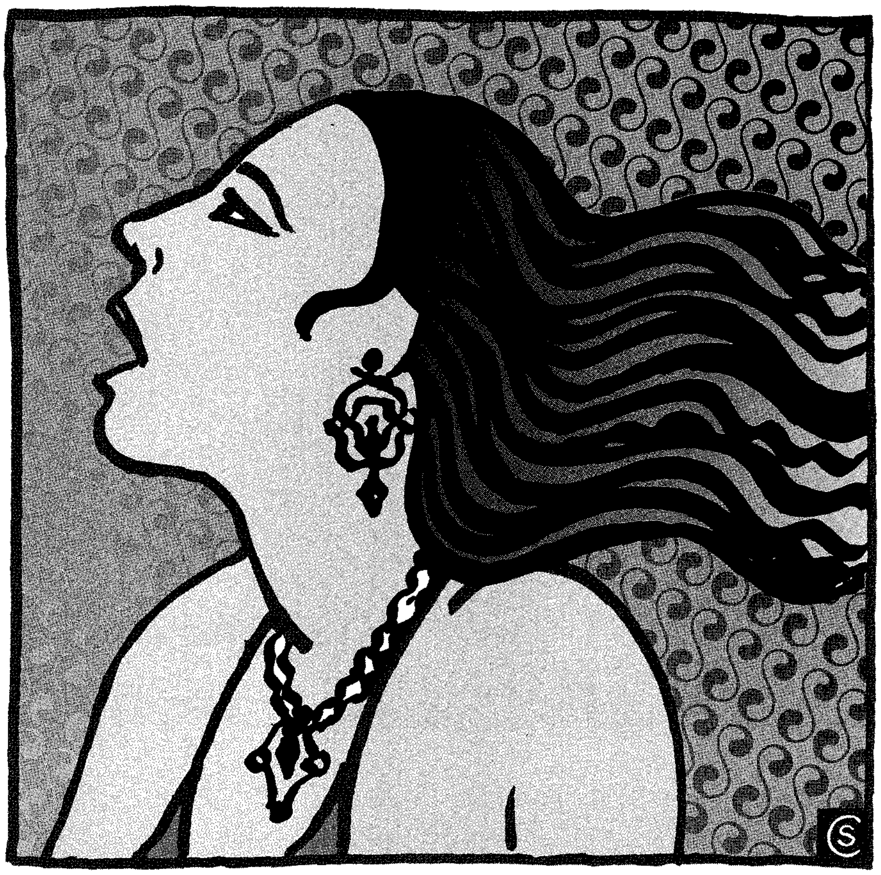
THE APPLE TREE: Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART ONE: VOYAGE:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART TWO: SHIPWRECK:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **COMPANY:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **GUTENBERG! THE MUSICAL!:** The Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 212-239-6200. **THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **NO CHILD . . .:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **ROOM SERVICE:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **THE SCENE:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TOYS IN THE ATTIC:** Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. **THE VERTICAL HOUR:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE:** Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"
Jan. 31: The folk rocker **Josh Ritter** performs a solo acoustic set. Feb. 1: Lately, **Howard Fishman**, a local gravelly-voiced singer and guitarist adept at delivering small-group swing as well as indie rock, has delved into the work of Bob Dylan, specifically the remarkable bit of Americana known as the Basement Tapes. This uptown show marks the release of Fishman's live "Basement Tapes" CD, which he recorded during a run at Joe's Pub last year. (Allen Room, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. See also Jazz and Standards.)

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Feb. 1: **Rachelle Garniez,** a devilishly enchanting accordionist and singer, has returned to her monthly residency. Specializing in smart and sassy songs about urban decay and wayward girls, which offer more than a hint of nostalgia (particularly in her evocations of the East Village, Coney Island, and Rockaway Beach, circa 1981), she has a voice that can leap from the sandpaper roughness of Tom Waits to the velvety softness of a forties chanteuse.



The World Music Institute brings the flamenco singer Estrella Morente to Town Hall.

SEYMOUR CHWAST

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Feb. 2: **Buckwheat Zydeco** serves up Southern dance music. Feb. 5: **Al Kooper,** a keyboardist and something of a classic-rock Zelig (he was the organist on "Like a Rolling Stone," once led Blood, Sweat & Tears, and discovered Lynyrd Skynyrd) celebrates his birthday, backed by the local cover band the Prisoners of 2nd Ave.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Jan. 31: **Paolo Nutini** sounds like it should be an Italian dessert, but the name actually belongs to an up-and-coming young Scottish singer. He follows in the slightly soulful, sensitive, and earthy tradition of such recent phenomena as James Blunt (on his side of the pond) and Jack Johnson (on ours). Already a big star at home, he's touring the States in support of his début album, "These Streets." Feb. 1: **Army of Anyone** is a minor supergroup pairing the former Nine Inch Nails guitarist and the ex-Filter front man Richard Patrick with the brothers Robert and Dean DeLeo, formerly of the ersatz-grunge faves Stone Temple Pilots. The group is on tour to promote its self-titled début album, but it's a safe bet that this battalion of B-listers will be unable to resist their respective back catalogues during their live set. Feb. 2: **James McMurtry,** a Texas bar-stool historian (and son of the novelist Larry McMurtry) who writes taut narratives about working-class life, El Caminos, and small towns, is touring with **Dave Alvin,** the former heart and soul of L.A.'s early-eighties roots-rock pioneers, the Blasters.

CARNEGIE HALL
57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—**David Byrne,** formerly of the Talking Heads, is curating a four-day festival here Feb. 1-4. On the first night, he's in Zankel Hall for a performance of music from "The Knee Plays," his 1985 collaboration with the director Robert Wilson. The following night, he's in the main concert hall, playing host to a number of avant-folk performers both young and old, including **Adem, Devendra Banhart, Vashti Bunyan, Cibelle, CocoRosie,** and **Vetiver.** He takes center stage on Feb. 3 with his band to deliver songs from "Here Lies Love," a song cycle written with Fatboy Slim about Imelda Marcos. The festival ends back in Zankel Hall with a new-music program, "One Note," featuring **Alarm Will Sound, Camille,** and **Haale.**

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Feb. 3: The Irish rocker **Pierce Turner.** Later that night: **The Animators,** a postmodern-pop band from Brooklyn favoring ambitious arrangements. For this show, the four regular band members will be joined by string and brass players. With another local standout, **Bronwen Exter,** a singer with a warm and all-enveloping voice. She'll be backed by **Jonathan Spottiswoode,** on guitar, and her brother, **Trevor,** on bass and cello. Feb. 5: The soul singer and Broadway star **Elisabeth Withers,** of "The Color Purple."

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Feb. 1-4: The ever-sensitive

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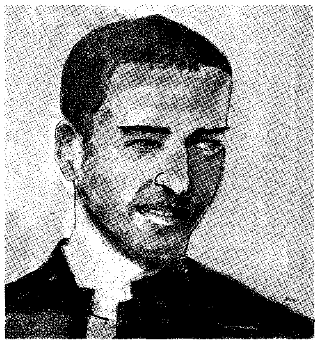
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BRINGING SALES BACK

Sales of CDs are sagging—pendulous, even—and in the Internet era anybody who can sell more than a million units is a superhero. Enter Captain Timberlake: in just over four months, Justin Timberlake has inspired two and a half million people to buy his latest album, "FutureSex/LoveSounds." Though a large share of credit should go to the producer Timbaland, whose brushed-aluminum beats make the album such a pleasure to listen to, Timberlake is no puppet. With neither the frequent traffic infractions nor the rehab antics of his young pop peers, Timberlake is ably sustaining the old-fashioned tradition of physical, real-time entertainment. When he appears at Madison Square Garden on Feb. 7, expect an unusually good dancer, an affable singer, and someone with a healthy sense of humor about his job. Opening for him is the singer Pink, whose last few albums haven't done justice to her pugnacious spirit and strong voice. Live, she can adjust her set list to favor earlier, stronger material and make you forget recent lapses and, on a good night, maybe even the headliner himself.



MICHAEL CRAWFORD

—Sasha Frere-Jones

former punk avatar **Jonathan Richman.** With the Spanish singer-songwriter **Kiko Veneno.**

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Jan. 31: The tense guitar rockers **Radio 4** close down this outer-borough club, which has been taken over not by some evil real-estate developer but by the folks behind the Bowery Ballroom, who plan to renovate it and reopen it as the Music Hall of Williamsburg.

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—Jan. 31: **Rockstar: Supernova,** the ensemble born out of the reality-television show of the same name. Feb. 3: The only thing more astonishing than the breadth, power, and sheer number of movie scores that the composer **Ennio Morricone** has created over the past half century is the fact that he has never conducted his music in public in the United States. He wrote the scores for "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" (Hugo Montenegro's pop-ish adaptation of the title track became an international hit in the late sixties), "Once Upon a Time in America," "The Untouchables," "Cinema Paradiso," and countless other films (reportedly, the composer himself has lost track of how many; the best estimate is more than five hundred), and he is stepping out in style, leading a two-hundred-piece orchestra and a choir with more than a hundred singers.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
The seventh annual Flamenco Festival New York gets under way with the U.S. début of **Estrella Morente.** This young singer, one of Spain's biggest flamenco stars, has the music in her blood, as she's the daughter of the singer Enrique Morente and the dancer Aurora Carbonell. Her latest album, "Mujeres," pays tribute to past masters of the genre, and although this is her first show in the States her music is not entirely unknown here: she provided the title track for Pedro Almodóvar's recent film, "Volver." (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. Feb. 3. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"
Feb. 2: The married collaborators **Alan** and **Marilyn Bergman** have been crafting lyrics together for half a century now, primarily for songs for the movies. A number of singers, including **Tony Bennett, Tyne Daly, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Sandy Stewart,** and **Lillias White,** will bring life to such Bergman gems as "Windmills of Your Mind," "How Do You Keep the Music Playing?," and, if anyone dares, "The Way We Were." Feb. 3: The singer and guitarist **John Pizzarelli** may not have the vocal style of Frank Sinatra, but he shares a sense of unerring swing and well-honed good taste. He pays tribute to Ol' Blue Eyes, backed by a big band. (Allen Room, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—**Tyshawn Sorey** is a young composer and multi-instrumentalist who has garnered attention as a drummer with Steve Coleman and Five Elements and with the trio Fieldwork, a collective with the pianist Vijay Iyer and the alto saxophonist Steve Lehman. Sorey's main project over the last three years has been leading the ensemble Oblique, which balances his own temporally elastic compositions with free improvisation. He's disbanding Oblique to move on to other projects, but he has one last show set up here for Jan. 31.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Jan. 31-Feb. 3: The **Lou Donaldson** quartet. The inimitable alto saxophonist Donaldson delivers a high-style blend of authentic bop and good-time R. & B.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Since returning to his New Orleans birthplace some years ago, the saxophonist **Donald Harrison** (here with his quartet Jan. 30-Feb. 4) has embraced the city's musical mélange, mixing mainstream jazz with Mardi Gras Indian chants, Meters-style funk, and contemporary hip-hop. The pianist **Mulgrew Miller,** splitting the bill along with his trio, has long completed his evolution from prized sideman to mature stylist, making him the Kenny Barron of his generation.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Jan. 30-Feb. 4: The master drummer **Herlin Riley** teams up with some old Wynton Marsalis-band alumni, including the pianist **Eric Reed,** the bassist **Reginald Veal,** and the saxophonist **Victor Goines.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—The trumpeter **Charles Tolliver's** big band fuses veteran players and younger acolytes into a brassy, commanding unit. On Jan. 30-Feb. 3, they celebrate the release of a new album, "With Love."

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—When is a quartet not a quartet? **Paul Motian's Trio 2000 + One** (here Jan. 30-Feb. 4) unites the subtly brilliant drummer with the pianist **Masabumi Kikuchi,** the bassist **Larry Grenadier,** the saxophonist **Bill McHenry,** and the vocalist **Rebecca Martin.** Yet, as their 2006 album, "On Broadway, Vol. 4," demonstrates, Kikuchi takes a walk whenever Martin approaches the microphone. No matter what the configuration, this shifting ensemble produces compelling, if demanding, music. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s"** features work by ten Weimar-era artists, including Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Ludwig Meidner. Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate."** Through May 20. ♦ **"Nan Kempner: American Chic."** Through March 4. ♦ **"Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art of the Papuan Gulf."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Discovering Tutankhamun: The Photographs of Harry Burton."** Through April 29. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Doug Aitken: Sleepwalkers."** Through Feb. 12, nightly from 5 to 10. ♦ **"OMA in Beijing: China Central Television Headquarters by Rem Koolhaas and Ole Scheeren."** Through Feb. 26. ♦ **"Artistic Collaborations: Fifty Years at Universal Limited Art Editions."** Through April 9. ♦ **"Eija-Liisa Ahtila: The Wind."** Through Feb. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso: Time, Truth, and Memory"** includes works by Zurbarán, Murillo, Velázquez, and Cotán, among many others. Through March 28. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005."** Through Feb. 11. ♦ **"Photography and the Self: The Legacy of F. Holland Day."** Through March 11. ♦ Terence Koh has his first solo museum show in the U.S., an installation in the museum's lobby. Through May 27. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (917-663-2453)—**"Burgeoning Geometries"** begins with pseudomorphism and ends with strongly individual visions. Diana Cooper and Jane South both make expansive, detail-oriented paper sculpture; South's achieves an airy massiveness, while Cooper's incorporates, among

many other things, a peephole looking out onto Forty-second Street. Phoebe Washburn and Charles Goldman make assemblages using scrap wood—hers is a cobbled-together dream environment, his are totemic objects. In the "ingenious uses for mass-produced doodads" category, Jason Rogenes and Tara Donovan rely on polystyrene packaging and straight pins, respectively, pursuing very different spatial articulations. The installations look especially nice after dark, when lights from midtown's skyscrapers shine into the Altria atrium. Through March 4. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Martín Ramírez."** Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and until 7:30 on Fridays.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—The last word in new looks for pill-bottle labels, runway-model hairdos, robot dogs, magazines, gardens, and even blogs can be perused in **"Design Life Now: National Design Triennial 2006."** Favorites will vary according to category, but here are some nominations: Han Feng's gorgeous wedding kimono, a cluster of ivory and cream silk blossoms created for Anthony Minghella's production of "Madama Butterfly"; Alison Berger's text-etched glass lampshade, which casts almost legible shadows; a sleek collapsible table in maple laminate by Christopher Douglas. David Hanson's interactive robot—a life-size Albert Einstein, whose face is made of a skin-like polymer called "Frubber"—handily wins the award for weirdness. Through July 29. ♦ **"Made to Scale: Staircase Masterpieces."** A collection of staircase models, mostly from nineteenth-century France. Through June 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Saul Steinberg: Illuminations."** Through March 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Josef Hoffmann: Interiors, 1902-1913."** Through Feb. 26. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

DAVID HAMMONS
This rare show by the elusive Hammons is a calculated shocker that really shocks. In an august Upper East Side gallery, five gorgeous fur coats, including one in wolf and a breathtaking chinchilla, hang on antique dress forms, tenderly lighted. Their backs are ruined by methods ranging from spray paint to fire. The fact that the irony is obvious—costly things are made pricier, as art, by destruction—doesn't soothe its sting. Hammons plainly appreciates the coats' beauty. His vandalism conveys cold rage at a plutocracy that patronizes art-world games, from the sharpest player at the table. Through March 10. (L&M, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JAMES BIDGOOD
Bidgood's garishly artificial photographs of nearly naked satyrs, fauns, toreros, and toughs were

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made in the nineteen-sixties for magazines like *Young Physique* and *Demi-Gods*, whose readers were under no illusions about their artistic or erotic intent. Working out of a tiny midtown apartment and using the name Les Folies des Hommes, Bidgood created underwater fantasias, aluminum-foil grottoes, and papier-mâché glades as settings for lithe, pretty boys dressed in nothing but white go-go boots or draped netting. Rescued from obscurity over the past decade, these pictures provide obvious inspiration for Pierre et Gilles and hilarious counterpoint to the far more earnest staged work of everyone from Justine Kurland to Gregory Crewdson. Bidgood's unabashed kitsch has never looked so contemporary. Through Feb. 17. (ClampArt, 521-531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)

and leather a decade and a half later. Through Feb. 10. (Metro, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

SERGIO PREGO
Shot from multiple angles in a camera-lined studio, Prego's stop-action video shows a mini-explosion hanging in the air like a tuft of poisoned cotton candy, now red, now yellow, both volatile and arrested. The vantage point whirls around the plume at sick-making speed; the fire's very prettiness makes it sinister. Prego shot his second (and less successful) video, an allusion to Tarkovsky's "Solyaris," in Tokyo, focussing on freeway ramps and office towers indistinguishable from those in any other megacity. The show's third component, a pair of fluorescent tubes on rotating arms, borrows mad-clown techniques from Bruce Nauman. Through Feb. 10. (Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923.)

TABLES FOR TWO
KAMPUCHEA NOODLE BAR

78 Rivington St., at Allen St. (212-529-3901)—New York loves its noodles, judging from the enduring popularity of Carmine's, the ever-growing popularity of Momofuku, and the fact that the obituary of the inventor of instant ramen spent three days, earlier this month, atop the *Times's* list of most-e-mailed articles. So it was with ado that the chowing classes anticipated the opening of Kampuchea. Focussing on Cambodian regional specialties, the restaurant—from the former Fleur de Sel manager Ratha Chau—had become, as one food blog noted in November, "the focus of many a bleeding-edge eater." Gawker predicted, "This soup stand will be the new hotness."

At first glance, the place does possess a certain warmth. Copper pots hang, Julia Child-style, from the ceiling of an open kitchen; a waiter (perhaps a touch too intimately) works the room with a tank top over his T-shirt, which is kind of like wearing your blouse under your bra. His colleague sportingly plays along when a boisterous foursome, seated next to a man in a wool sweater patterned after a Budweiser label, subjects him to a game of Name That Movie Line. (Line: "I'm a fiend for mojitos!" Movie: "Miami Vice.") The mojito in question contains not just mint but coconut; the Martini, lychee; the margarita, blackberries that turn out pink. The cocktails are a bright spot, although it's hard to squelch a vision of Carmen Miranda's turban going into the blender.

Once the grilled cuttlefish (squishy, fishy) and the sweet-chili corn (passable, but with a cloying coconut mayo) arrive, another suspicion arises: the drinks were just a distraction ploy, the rainbow in a vast flavorless sky. According to a note at the top of the menu, its offerings are a "tribute to street food," but, for zest and even thoughtfulness, the pretzel cart wins. Of the noodle soups, *phom penh katiev* has all the nuance of a vat of duck sauce, while the chicken *katiev*—aromatic, gingery, and with a bit of kick—begins to feel exceptional, but only in its decentness. Most satisfying is a sandwich of skirt steak piled onto buttery French bread, though the promised heat—this time, in the form of sambal chili—seems, typically, nowhere in evidence. (Open Mondays through Thursdays for dinner, and Fridays through Sundays for lunch and dinner. Entrées $7-$17.)

—*Lauren Collins*

BRENT GREEN
The animator Brent Green presents a three-screen exhibition in which the danse macabre of childhood terrors takes a comic turn. Like an art-school Tim Burton, Green turns jerkily graceful stick figures, crazily akimbo empty houses, and red-hot Hell into endlessly suggestive scenarios. "Paulina Hollers," the longest piece (at twelve minutes), tracks the tragic ends of a mother and son, and their subsequent efforts to escape the underworld. "Carlin" careens through Green's childhood home with an eerie singsong voice-over but veers toward overkill when the camera lingers on a skeletal life-size wooden doll representing Green's long-ill aunt. Through Feb. 3. (Bellwether, 134 Tenth Ave. 212-929-5959.)

PAULINA OLOWSKA
In keeping with the new Polish chic (this show overlapped with the exhibition "Polish Socialist Conceptualism of the 70s," at Orchard on the Lower East Side), Olowska's large-scale collages incorporate Eastern Bloc media images from the sixties and seventies. (The artist's own childhood was spent in Warsaw, with frequent trips to Chicago.) In addition to pictures of dance troupes and theatre productions culled from U.S. and Soviet propaganda magazines (*Amerika* for them; *Soviet Life* for us), the artist peppers her work with stark images of Polish punks. The overriding message seems to be that, despite the official differences between capitalism and communism, everyone loved eyeliner and miniskirts in the sixties and spiky hair and leather a decade and a half later.

BRIAN ULRICH
The seductions and excesses of consumer culture aren't exactly new subjects for photographers; Ulrich follows Stephen Shore, Martin Parr, Walead Beshty, and Andreas Gursky into the supermarket aisles. But even if Ulrich isn't breaking new ground, he *is* staking out these big, over-bright spaces with the careful precision of an anthropologist investigating the habits of an unusually self-absorbed tribe. His shoppers look dazed—stunned into catatonia by the impossibility of making a choice among the cheeses, shoes, toy soldiers, or fishing rods arrayed before their unfocussed eyes. Turned into large-scale color photos as glossy as sales signs, Ulrich's pictures would be comic if they weren't so sad. Through Feb. 10. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

BOYD WEBB
The enormous color photographs this British artist made in the mid-nineteen-eighties (but printed only recently) have so much nutty charm that it's easy to overlook how smart and elegant they are. Each of the eleven pictures here begins with a sketchily constructed set, some simple props, and, more often than not, a naked person or two. Webb's worlds sometimes involve a paint-splattered cosmos and balloon-like planets, one of which offers a breast to suckle, but he also conjures a seascape from a length of blue-and-white patterned fabric, or a verdant, mountainous landscape from a lumpy green rug. Part child's play, part Theatre of the Ridiculous, Webb's photographs don't look like period relics; instead, they make a lot of contemporary work look tired and overdone. Through Feb. 17. (Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-627-1018.)

HENRY WESSEL
These two shows, timed to coincide with a retrospective at the San Francisco MOMA, should help reëstablish Wessel in the mainstream of photographic history for the tough, witty, but often overlooked work he began making in the late nineteen-sixties. His stark black-and-white images of the ordinary American landscape, many of them from California and other points west, touch on the emptiness of pop culture as well as its iconic appeal. The best pictures will remind you of Walker Evans, Lee Friedlander, and Ed Ruscha, and they're as bluntly matter-of-fact as they are sly. At Cowles, some recent color photos of Las Vegas tend to go over the top, Martin Parr-style, but otherwise Wessel is a model of restraint, the coolest of the cool. Through Feb. 10 at Mann (210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 212-989-7600); through Feb. 17 at Cowles (537 W. 24th St. 212-741-8999).

Short List

DANIEL BUREN: Bortolami Dayan, 510 W. 25th St. 212-727-2050. Through Feb. 15. **ROZ CHAST:** Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Feb. 10. **MARK GROTJAHN:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Feb. 28. **JONAS MEKAS:** Stendhal, 545 W. 20th St. 212-366-1549. Through Feb. 10. **JENNY PERLIN / PETER WELZ:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through Feb. 10. **LOLO VELEKO / SEYDOU KEITA:** Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778. Through Feb. 24. **ROBERT WILSON:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through Feb. 3.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

JONATHAN PODWIL
Podwil owes plenty to European predecessors like Gerhard Richter and Luc Tuymans, both in style and in his investigation of the relationship between painting, photography, and history. Here, Podwil has honed the trope to one image, a clip from a video of a Baghdad meeting between Donald Rumsfeld and Saddam Hussein in 1983. A nondescript couch is featured in nearly every canvas, but neither of the figures occupying it is ever fully visible. In the two years since Podwil started the series, Rumsfeld has resigned and Saddam has been executed; the paintings explore the seediness of shadowy political couplings and the way history eventually overtakes all parties involved. Through Feb. 4. (Plane Space, 102 Charles St. 917-606-1268.)

Short List

RYAN MCGINLEY: Team, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219. Through Feb. 10. **CHARLES MILLER:** Think Tank 3, 447 Hudson St. 212-647-8595. Through March 15. **HARRIET SHORR:** Pelavin, 13 Jay St. 212-925-9424. Through March 3.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

TONY FITZPATRICK / DARINA KARPOV
The Damon Runyon of Chicago, Tony Fitzpatrick, presents "The Life," a new installment in his ongoing series of hog-butcher-to-the-world collages. Floozies, gamblers, bellhops, and cat-headed nudes float in a sparkly netherworld pieced together from magazine cutouts, stamps, matchbook covers, and poetic snippets of the "night sky slides a hand up her dress" variety. Karpov's watercolors, in the back gallery, are composed of sharp-edged vectors that might represent crystal facets, abstract planes, or airplane wings. Ropy tendrils and confetti or shrapnel shards fill the work with energies just balanced between centrifugal and centripetal. Through Feb. 5. (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

PHOTOGRAPH: FRED CHARLES (DETAIL)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TWILIGHT SLEEP

Doug Aitken's "Sleepwalkers"—five silent fifteen-minute video fictions about night-working New Yorkers, projected each evening onto outside walls of MOMA and the neighboring American Folk Art Museum—is very public and undoubtedly art, but it knits the terms only notionally. Production values are tip-top. The actors, including Donald Sutherland, as a rich businessman, and Tilda Swinton, as an office worker, look terrific. Sequences of semi-abstract motifs—cups, wheels, lights, clocks—generate grand, elegant razzle-dazzle. Always in solitude, the characters wake up, mope, go to work, mope, work, then engage in drumming, tap dancing, and other frenetic didos. The mood is fearfully solemn. How melancholy is it to be gainfully employed and gorgeous in the city? Most gravely, Aitken's attempt to bridge gaps between public spectacle and private experience manages to vitiate both. The work is too archly arty to absorb and too lugubriously subjective—not to mention unstreet-smartly distracting, on nocturnal crosstown blocks—to entertain. Get a room.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
As far back as the forties, Jerome Robbins had plans to create a ballet based on S. Ansky's drama of Jewish mysticism, "The Dybbuk." But the project, with its dramatic score by Leonard Bernstein, only came together in 1974. Soon after its début, Robbins began to fiddle with it, reducing it to "Dybbuk Variations" and later "Suite of Dances"; it was never again performed by the company in its full, original form. On Friday, City Ballet revives this compelling and strange work, with the excellent Jenifer Ringer and Benjamin Millepied in the lead roles. ♦ Jan. 31 and Feb. 6 at 7:30 and Feb. 4 at 3: "Episodes," "Tribute," and "Vienna Waltzes." ♦ Feb. 1 at 8 and Feb. 3 at 2: "Square Dance," "Liebeslieder Walzer," and "Stars and Stripes." ♦ Feb. 2-3 at 8: "Serenade," "Dybbuk," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through Feb. 25.)

SUSAN MARSHALL AND COMPANY
Dance Theatre Workshop offers a second look at last year's much praised "Cloudless." (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Jan. 30-Feb. 3 at 7:30.)

EVIDENCE, A DANCE COMPANY
In two alternating programs that span a decade of work, Ronald K. Brown serves up his trademark blend of African dance, hip-hop, and modern dance. A New York première, "Truth Don Die," combines Senegalese *sabar* steps with horn riffs and expansive, joyful motion. Revivals include club-inflected pieces like "Grace" (1999) and an all-male excerpt from 1998's "Better Days." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 30-31 at 7:30, Feb. 1-2 at 8, Feb. 3 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 4 at 2 and 7:30.)

"THE POD PROJECT"
In Nancy Bannon's new work, thirteen "pods," each eight feet in diameter, enclose three-minute scenes performed for one audience member at a time. These range from the unsubtle to the charmingly random, like the one in which a deranged waitress plays "Ode to Joy" on water glasses. (20Greene gallery, 20 Greene St. 800-838-3006. Jan. 31-Feb. 5 at 7:30 and 9. Through Feb. 11.)

JANIS BRENNER & GUESTS
In this commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first performance of her choreography, Brenner celebrates her teachers and collaborators as much as herself. Each night features a different guest, but Brenner holds her own, as a choreographer of meticulous craftsmanship and a funny and poignantly precise performer. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, 131 E. 10th St., at Second Ave. 212-674-8194. Feb. 1-4 at 8:30.)

TAKE DANCE COMPANY
The compositions of Takehiro Ueyama, the company director and a veteran of the Paul Taylor Dance Company, are big, free, unpretty, and tinged with a whiff of Taylor, and his dancers' presentation of them is stylish. At the Joyce SoHo, Ueyama's new piece, "Orange"—a sextet set to movements from several Bach works for strings—will be performed alongside a new solo made for him by Kazuko Hirabayashi. (155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. Feb. 1-4 at 8.)

REGINA NEJMAN, ANNA SPERBER, AND MEGAN SPRENGER
A midday program at the 92nd Street Y showcases work by three emerging female choreographers. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 2 at 12.)

NEW CHAMBER BALLET
The simplicity of Miro Magloire's format—five classically trained dancers, two musicians, a raw performance space—can be disconcertingly intimate, but this spareness is not only a product of economy; Magloire means to create an essential experience of ballet. His newest work is set to Luciano Berio's "Sequenza VIII," and there is also a playfully theatrical piece by the guest choreographer, Deborah Lohse. (City Center Studios, 130 W. 56th St. 212-868-4444. Feb. 2-3 at 8:30.)

DD DORVILLIER
This endlessly inventive choreographer is in the habit of transforming her performance space visually and

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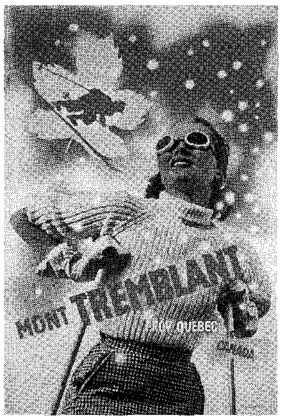

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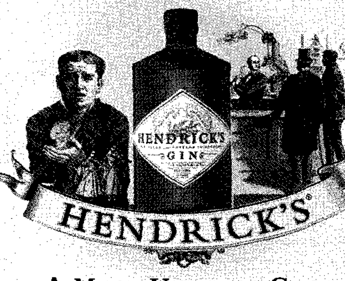

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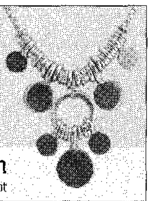

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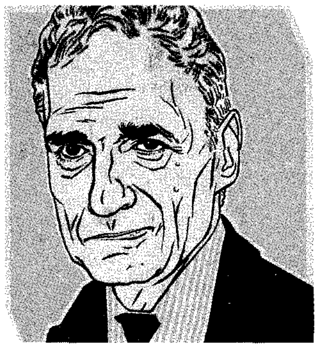
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE THIRD MAN

When Ralph Nader was a child, his father asked him, "What did you learn in school today? Did you learn how to believe or did you learn how to think?" Henriette Mantel and Steve Skrovan, who co-directed



"An Unreasonable Man," a fascinating documentary portrait of Nader, take us through his exhilarating early years of civic activity, in which a man who never stopped thinking improved the way we drive, eat, shop, breathe, and take medicine. But the movie is also the record of a tragedy. The filmmakers give equal time to critics of Nader's Presidential runs in 2000 and 2004 (including Todd Gitlin and Eric Alterman), who deride him as a deluded egotist eager to take votes away from Al Gore and John Kerry, and to Nader's supporters, who present him as a patriotic American who has remained utterly consistent in doing what's best for the country. We are free to make up our own minds. So be it. The long interview with Nader that is dispersed throughout the film suggests that he became, in later years, a thoughtless man who believes only in himself. Playing at IFC Center.

—*David Denby*

aurally. Her new piece, "Nottthing is Importanttt," turns the theatre at the Kitchen into a cinema and fills it with a soundscape by Zeena Parkins, nine dancers, and a video projection. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Feb. 2-3 at 8. Through Feb. 10.)

"PADDYWACK"
Lincoln Center's children's concert series, "Family Musik," presents the première of a "tap-dance concerto" by Rob Kapilow, who will conduct and host à la Bernstein. Built around nursery-rhyme rhythms, the concerto provides shifting settings for some cute jokes and plenty of no-nonsense hoofing from the soloist, Ayodele Casel. The program also includes three other contemporary works. (Alice Tully Hall, Broadway at 65th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 3 at 2 and 4.)

NICHOLASLEICHTERDANCE
Michael Christie conducts the Brooklyn Philharmonic in the world première of Leichter's "Rite of Spring." Leichter discards the primal fertility-rite narrative in favor of a sociopolitical take: his Everyman dancers wear factory-worker overalls and slog through repetitive tasks, servants of an invisible master. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Feb. 3 at 8.)

LES BALLETS AFRICAINS
The Guinean ensemble delivers African history in drum-driven, large-scale dance spectacles. "Mandinka Memories" tells the story of Soundiata Keita, the founder of the Mali empire. Oracles and unheeded visions lead to a fierce battle and a grand celebration for the new king. (Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. Feb. 3 at 8.)

BILL T. JONES/ARNIE ZANE DANCE COMPANY
Bill T. Jones' collage "Another Evening: I Bow Down" was first performed last February. While its components (which include personal narrative, news sound bites, and Biblical allegory) are familiar by now, its subject—the way human beings process calamity—remains complex and elusive. (New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center St., Newark, N.J. 888-466-5722. Feb. 3 at 7:30 and Feb. 4 at 3.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Carlo Rizzi conducts Puccini's **"La Bohème,"** in the grandiloquent, crowd-drawing Zeffirelli production; singing are the impressive Cristina Gallardo-Domâs and Marcello Giordani, as Mimì and Rodolfo, and Ainhoa Arteta and Dwayne Croft, as Musetta and Marcello. (Jan. 31 at 7:30 and Feb. 3 at 1:30.) ♦ **"La Traviata,"** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Wookyung Kim, and Charles Taylor in the leading roles; Carlo Rizzi. (Feb. 1 at 8.) ♦ Karita Mattila may be best known to Met audiences for her searing portrayal of Strauss's Salome, but her rendition of the title role of Janáček's **"Jenůfa"** is equally distinctive. The Olivier Tambosi production is static and dull, but it's easily transcended by the interpretive powers of Mattila and the formidable Anja Silja, who takes the role of Kostelnicka; Jiří Bělohlávek, a renowned Czech master, conducts. (Feb. 2 and Feb. 6 at 8.) ♦ A Zeffirelli-rich week continues with a revival of his production of the classic verist double bill, **"Cavalleria Rusticana"** and **"Pagliacci."** Such a pairing may be routine, but the Met's cast is not—the first features such singers as Dolora Zajick, Eduardo Villa, and Mark Delavan, while the second boasts Krassimira Stoyanova, Salvatore Licitra, Lado Ataneli, and Russell Braun in the leading roles; Marco Armiliato. (Feb. 3 at 8.) ♦ Anna Netrebko, the starring attraction in Bellini's **"I Puritani,"** may not have quite the silvery fioritura of such legends as Sills or Sutherland. But she sings the role of Elvira Walton with honest feeling, an awesome dynamic range, and a command of legato phrasing that approaches the limits of human possibility. Also with Gregory Kunde, Franco Vassallo, and John Relyea, who brings his rock-solid basso to the role of Giorgio. (Feb. 5 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Esa-Pekka Salonen is not only a conductor of compellingly taut performances but a composer whose mercurial yet firmly elegant works can easily stand on their own merits. The Philharmonic gives us both Salonens at once in its latest round of concerts, in which the conductor will lead the orchestra in the world-première performances of his Piano Concerto—with the formidable Yefim Bronfman at the keyboard—along with repertory-rank orchestrations by Ravel (of his own "Le Tombeau de Couperin" and of Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition"). (Feb. 1 at 7:30 and Feb. 2-3 at 8.) ♦ In one of the orchestra's occasional "Hear & Now" concerts, Salonen will discuss the new work with Steven Stucky before conducting a complete performance with Bronfman and the band. (Feb. 6 at 6:45.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

ISRAEL PHILHARMONIC
Carnegie Hall hosts two performances by Israel's preëminent cultural ambassadors, with two of their favorite conductors on the podium and two commanding soloists in the spotlight. Jan. 30 at 8: Lorin Maazel leads the orchestra in works by Beethoven (including the Violin Concerto, with Maxim Vengerov) and Mussorgsky ("Pictures at an Exhibition"). ♦ Feb. 1 at 8: Music by Weber, Mahler (the "Rückert-Lieder," with Thomas Hampson), and Berlioz (the "Symphonie Fantastique"), led by the orchestra's conductor for life, Zubin Mehta. (212-247-7800.)

BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC
The young and energetic Michael Christie kicks off his sophomore year as music director. Feb. 1 at 8: "Four Scored" brings Laurie Anderson, Nellie McKay, Joan Osborne, and Suzanne Vega to the stage for an evening of newly orchestrated versions of their songs. ♦ Feb. 3 at 8: The ensemble is joined by the didgeridoo player William Barton and Nicholasleichterdance for "Earth Awakened," an evening exploring the relationships between man and nature. The concert features two works by Peter Sculthorpe, the dean of Australian composers, along with Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring." (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)

"FOCUS!: THE MAGYAR LEGACY"
The Juilliard Orchestra, in the capable hands of the conductor Diego Masson, winds up the school's annual "Focus!" festival—which this year looks at the remarkable development of Hungarian music after Bartók—with an evening that features works by the twin titans Ligeti (the gorgeous Violin Concerto, with Francesca Anderegg) and Kurtág ("Stele"). (Feb. 2 at 8. Free tickets, which are required, are available at the Juilliard Box Office. For a complete listing of concerts, see www.juilliard.edu.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Britten's Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings, the highlight of the conductorless ensemble's latest concert at Carnegie Hall, should benefit not only from the star quality of the tenor Ian Bostridge but from the forceful yet elegant virtuosity of one of the group's hornists, Stewart Rose. Works by Martinů and Mozart (the "Posthorn" Serenade) complete the program. (212-247-7800. Feb. 6 at 8.)

RECITALS

LYRIC CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY
Three works by Zhou Long—a quiet but distinctive voice amid the new wave of Chinese-American composers—are at the core of a program by the violinist Cho-Liang Lin, the cellist Hai-Ye Ni, and the pianist Helen Huang that also features music by Debussy and Mendelssohn (the Piano Trio in D Minor). (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. 212-279-4200. Jan. 31 at 7:30.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "NEW MUSIC IN THE ROSE"
A group that includes the cellist Fred Sherry and the Daedalus Quartet offers pieces by Nicholas Maw, Bright Sheng, and Leon Kirchner—the Society's three "season composers," each of whom will have works

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

featured in regular concerts later in the year. (Rose Rehearsal Studio, Rose Bldg. 212-875-5788. Feb. 1 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC

Vladimir Stoupel, a Russian-born pianist with broad interests and an impressive international career, is in residence at the barge this weekend. Feb. 1-2 at 7:30: A solo recital mixing classics by Schubert and Schumann ("Faschingsschwank aus Wien") with a work by the German composer (and former Salzburg Festival intendant) Peter Ruzicka. ♦ Feb. 3 at 7:30 and Feb. 4 at 4: The violinist Judith Ingolfsson, another busy soloist, joins Stoupel in more music by Schubert and Schumann (the compelling Violin Sonata in A Minor, Op. 105) along with Ravel's "Tzigane." (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MILLER THEATRE COMPOSER PORTRAIT: FRANK ZAPPA

The catalogue of the stirring young Fireworks Ensemble—consisting of inventive arrangements and interpretations of music by composers ranging from Bach to Ellington and Aphex Twin—is almost as eclectic as the Columbia University series that hosts its latest concert. It's an evening of pioneering instrumental-rock pieces and rarely heard classical works by Zappa, including "T'Mershi Duween," "The Perfect Stranger," and songs from "The Yellow Shark," an orchestral album that he released shortly before his death, in 1993. (Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Feb. 2 at 8.)

AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM: "CLASSICAL INTIMACIES"

The cellist Florian Kitt—a lauded, longtime advocate for new music who earned the admiration of such composers as Berio and Takemitsu—is the featured attraction in a new series of chamber programs offered at the Forum's sleek little concert hall. His program with the pianist Rita Medjimorec includes works by Kodály, Takemitsu, Britten (the Sonata for Cello and Piano), and Martin Lichtfuss (a première). (11 E. 52nd St. Feb. 3 at 8. For free tickets, which are required, call 212-319-5300, ext. 222.)

CONCERTANTE

Programs from this vibrant string sextet are always tweaked just enough to catch the eye of the connoisseur. Its next concert features the pianist Adam Neiman, who will not only take the solo role in Dvořák's Piano Quintet in E-Flat Major but will back up the group in the same composer's Bagatelles for Two Violins, Cello, and Harmonium. Schulhoff's String Sextet completes the program. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Feb. 4 at 3.)

MUSIC AT THE FRICK COLLECTION: MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

The Berkeley baroque trio makes its New York début in the Frick's gilded auditorium, performing a variety of works by Handel, Corelli ("La Folia"), Biber, and Bach. (1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715. Feb. 4 at 5.)

MOVIES OPENING

BECAUSE I SAID SO

Michael Lehmann directed this comedy, about a mother (Diane Keaton) who plays matchmaker for her daughter (Mandy Moore). Opening Feb. 2. (In wide release.)

EAST OF HAVANA

A documentary, directed by Jauretsi Saizarbitoria and Emilia Menocal, about Cuban rappers. In Spanish. Opening Feb. 2. (IFC Center.)

FACTORY GIRL

George Hickenlooper directed this bio-pic about Edie Sedgwick and her years with Andy Warhol's Factory. Starring Sienna Miller and Guy Pearce. Opening Feb. 2. (In wide release.)

FIRED!

A documentary by Annabelle Gurwitch, featuring interviews with people who have lost their jobs. Opening Feb. 2. (Village East Cinemas.)

IN THE PIT

A documentary by Juan Carlos Rulfo about highway-construction workers in Mexico City. In Spanish. Opening Feb. 2. (Cinema Village.)

THE MESSENGERS

A horror film, directed by Danny Pang and Oxide Pang, about a teen-age girl who sees ghosts. Starring Dylan McDermott and Penelope Ann Miller. Opening Feb. 2. (In wide release.)

Photographs by Lolo Veleko are on view at Danziger.

PUCCINI FOR BEGINNERS

After a heterosexual couple breaks up, a bisexual woman dates both ex-partners. Starring Jennifer Dundas, Justin Kirk, and Gretchen Mol. Directed by Maria Maggenti. Opening Feb. 2. (Angelika Film Center and Chelsea Cinemas.)

THE SITUATION

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Feb. 2. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

AN UNREASONABLE MAN

A documentary about Ralph Nader, directed by Henriette Mantel and Steve Skrovan. Opening Jan. 31. (IFC Center.)

NOW PLAYING

BREAKING AND ENTERING

At home, Will Francis (Jude Law), a fashionable young London architect, has a difficult time. Liv (Robin Wright Penn), his girlfriend of ten years, a melancholy, becalmed beauty of mixed Swedish and American background, has a talented, vivid, autistic daughter—a terrific gymnast who won't eat, sleep, or calm down. At work, Will is repeatedly robbed, his office in North London broken into at night. Will follows the thief, a fifteen-year-old boy, Miro (Rafi Gavron), to an apartment in a council flat, where he discovers Miro's mother, Amira (Juliette Binoche), a Bosnian refugee with a refined face and a full peasant body. He starts an affair with her, going back and forth between the two women. The romantic drama is set against the changing milieu of the King's Cross area, a multicultural gathering ground in which not terribly dangerous thieves and hookers from the Balkan breakup and other diasporas try to find some way of fitting into an alien society. Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, the movie is shrewd and benevolent but rather mild—clemency, not judgment, is in Minghella's heart. Vera Farmiga has a hilarious bit as a huffy Balkan streetwalker wearing very little under her overcoat.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/29/07.) (Paris and Sunshine Cinema.)

CHILDREN OF MEN

The Britain of 2027, as prophesied by Alfonso Cuarón in his new film, looks ominously close to the Britain of today—crowded, gray, and anxious. Two new crises have arisen: first, immigrants are being rounded up and caged like beasts, and, second, nobody, either in Britain or elsewhere, is able to give birth. The world is infertile, and therefore doomed; when a young woman becomes pregnant, everybody wants a piece of her. Into this crisis comes the weary Theo (Clive Owen), who is asked by an old girlfriend (Julianne Moore) to guide the expectant mother to freedom through a landscape of tribulation and trial. Cuarón gives us no time to ruminate on the credibility of his setup, quickening the pace until we are caught in a breathless running battle between dissenters and government troops. The film, based on a novel by P. D. James, is neither likable nor heartening; nor, despite the rapture of the child's birth, does it feel like the bringer of good news. Yet the fierceness of the storytelling exerts an unbroken grip, and there is leavening, of a sort, from Michael Caine, who plays a joint-puffing hippie in the woods—the last happy man in the world.—*Anthony Lane* (1/8/07) (In wide release.)

CHINA BLUE

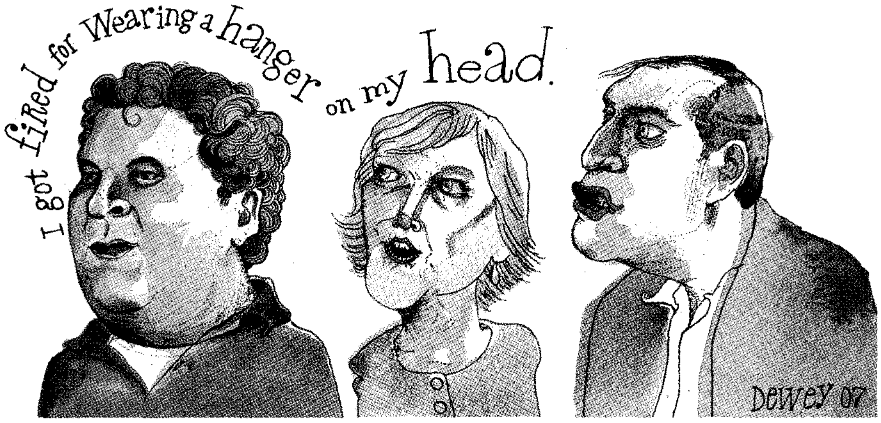
In this didactic yet revelatory documentary, the director Micha X. Peled somehow manages to get inside a factory and workers' dorm in China and investigate the labor abuses that are commonplace there. He follows three teen-age girls who live and work there, centering the film around Jasmine, who has left her family's farm in Szechuan province to work as a thread-trimmer in a bluejeans plant for a piecework rate that averages about six cents an hour—and has her first month's pay held as a "deposit" to prevent her from leaving. Unpaid overtime, sleep deprivation from mandatory round-the-clock shifts, arbitrary fines, and Draconian rules are some of the many depredations inflicted on Chinese workers, and Peled gets current and former employees to discuss them on camera—though, as one factory owner says, he knows he has the upper hand because "all over the world they can't live without denim." A title card states that Peled was detained by Chinese authorities and that some footage was confiscated; it's too bad he didn't work into the film the story of how he was able to make it at all. In Cantonese, English, and Mandarin.—*Richard Brody* (Anthology Film Archives; Jan. 31-Feb. 1.)

DANGER: DIABOLIK

As swift and visually witty as it is lush and lubricious, this hard to resist *fumetti* fantasy about a lithe superthief, Diabolik (John Phillip Law), and his voluptuous gal, Eva (Marisa Mell), is as prime an example of Pop art as anything by Lichtenstein or Warhol. Diabolik pulls jobs for love and money, but he's only half a Robin Hood: he robs from the rich to give to himself and to Eva. He disrupts a government press conference with "exhilaration gas." And that's what this movie is: an exhilarating gas. The director, Mario Bava, boasts a true comic-book feel for dynamic split perspectives, and he and his cast give the action a bubbly core. The film is genuinely playful, whether Diabolik and Eva are outwitting law and order in their bodysuits and hip-length tunics, or showering in see-through stalls with opaque circular patches to conceal their privates. The loony international cast includes Michel Piccoli as the chief inspector, Adolfo Celi as a mobster, and the gap-toothed Terry-Thomas as a government minister. Ennio Morricone's eclectic and inventive score helps the movie coalesce into a psychedelic swirl. Released in 1968.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Feb. 6.)

THE DEPARTED

This merrily vicious and violent Martin Scorsese film about cops and gangsters in Boston will never haunt your sleep, as “Taxi Driver” and “Raging Bull” do, but it will keep you excited and amused for well over two hours. A South Boston mobster (Jack Nicholson) recruits a young neighborhood kid and later places him, as a grownup (played by Matt Damon), in the Massachusetts State Police; the police, in turn, place their own undercover guy (Leonardo DiCaprio) in the crime boss's outfit. It's a double-mole story in which the two moles, in the end, wind up hunting each other.


I got fired for Wearing a hanger on my head.
DEWEY 07

Annabelle Gurwitch and friends talk about termination in “Fired!,” opening Feb. 2.

DEWEY SAUNDERS

“The Departed” is a remake of the Hong Kong thriller “Infernal Affairs,” directed by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, and it has the speed and volatility of a Hong Kong movie. But Scorsese and the screenwriter, William Monahan, have added weight to the story by digging deep into urban tribal lore—the memories of loyalty and betrayal going back for decades, the nasty old jokes, the bullying insults and invective. Nicholson doesn't seem to take the movie very seriously—he has a ball singing Irish ditties and making rat faces and holding up severed hands—but everyone else is both disciplined and highly adept at delivering the foulmouthed idiom. With Martin Sheen, Mark Wahlberg, and Alec Baldwin as cops, and Vera Farmiga as a police psychiatrist who is attracted to both young men.—*D.D.* (10/16/06) (In wide release.)

DREAMGIRLS

Bill Condon's adaptation of the 1981 Broadway musical, the barely disguised tale of Berry Gordy and the rise of the Supremes, in the sixties, has an irresistible momentum. There are written expository passages and photomontages chronicling the events of the period, but just about everything else is sung. The songs aren't commentary on the drama; they *are* the drama. The three women in the original group are played by Anika Noni Rose, Beyoncé Knowles, and Jennifer Hudson, whose character, the oversized Effie, doesn't fit—she has a big, soulful voice and an even bigger mouth. She's thrown out but not forgotten, and Beyoncé, whom we had barely noticed at first, moves into the center of the movie. Based on that glamorous imp Diana Ross, she allows the Berry Gordy figure (Jamie Foxx) to dress her up as a swank mannequin but finally breaks free. In its way, the picture is a serious study of the issue of commercial packaging versus art.—*D.D.* (12/25/06 & 1/1/07) (In wide release.)

THE EMPEROR'S NAKED ARMY MARCHES ON

Kenzo Okuzaki, one of the few survivors of the Japanese Army's fight to the death on New Guinea, returned home and went mad with antisocial rage, killing a real-estate broker, shooting pachinko balls at Emperor Hirohito, and publishing pornographic depictions of him, which got Okuzaki a total of thirteen years in jail. After his release, in the nineteen-eighties, Okuzaki became a one-man truth squad. With the director and cinematographer Kazuo Hara in tow, he barged into the homes and workplaces of former officers from the doomed campaign and compelled them—sometimes with violence—to discuss their roles in the deaths of several soldiers from the outfit who were executed by firing squad after the war had ended. The stories he extracts, involving blind obedience, starvation, and cannibalism, are shocking, as is the film's underlying premise, the failure of the Japanese government to bring these and other wartime atrocities to light. It seems to have taken a madman to face the horrors that were swept under the rug, and Hara coolly observes the compromised inquisitor on his righteous mission, parsing the chaotically unfolding events with a visual clarity that raises it to a complex and ambiguous drama of a very high order. Released in 1987. In Japanese.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Jan. 31 and Feb. 2-4.)

THE ITALIAN

A heartfelt but plodding drama about Vanya Solntsev (Kolya Spiridonov), a quiet, thoughtful six-year-old boy in a Dickensian orphanage in Russia, who is being considered for adoption by an Italian couple. The managers of the threadbare facility have a great interest in the transaction, as the foreigners' fees will line their pockets. But the mother of an earlier adoptee comes to reclaim her son, finds him gone, and kills herself; Vanya, seized with guilt regarding his own mother, whom he doesn't remember, flees the orphanage to look for her. The director Andrei Kravchuk sketchily and unoriginally suggests the terrors of the wide world through the eyes of a defenseless child. His characters come off as blank pawns in the screenplay's mechanisms, and the diffuse sentimentality defangs any social critique. In Russian.—*R.B.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA

In the early scenes of Clint Eastwood's “Flags of Our Fathers,” the Japanese Army, dug into caves and tunnels, lured the Americans far onto the beach by holding their fire. Now, in a unique reversal of perspective, we are inside the caves, and, cast among the Others, we find ourselves in the morally demanding but exhilarating position of rooting for them. Taken together with “Flags,” this movie is a considerable act of ethical imagination, but it's not a great film. Both the defender of the island, General Kuribayashi (Ken Watanabe), and his friend and fellow-officer Baron Nishi (Tsuyoshi Ihara), an Olympic equestrian before the war, are such idealized figures—modest, humane, and gallant—that they lose any serious interest as characters. The young Japanese soldier Saigo (Kazunari Ninomiya), a gentle baker who was conscripted into the Army and just wants to get back to his family, is meant to be a life-affirming presence among the death cultists, but, as constructed by the screenwriter, Iris Yamashita, he's a slight and bashful fellow who can't carry the philosophical weight that's been assigned to him. The movie was impressively, but also monotonously, shot by the cinematographer Tom Stern in the same style as “Flags of Our Fathers”—in a largely black-and-white palette, with occasional flashes of wine-dark blood or bits of orange flame. In Japanese.—*D.D.* (1/15/07) (In wide release.)

LITTLE CHILDREN

A disappointed young mother (Kate Winslet) who has given up graduate school for a lousy marriage in the suburbs starts an affair with a former golden-boy college jock (Patrick Wilson), who is also married but stranded in adulthood. There's an element of garden-variety suspense in Todd Field's new movie, which he adapted with Tom Perrotta from Perrotta's novel—will the lovers run away together? But the movie is about a lot more. In a community devoted to the protection of children, a convicted sex offender (Jackie Earle Haley) shows up. The consternation he creates is so extreme that it seems the filmmakers might be suggesting a metaphor for the indeterminate but all-encompassing threat of terrorism; at the least, they are suggesting that both men and women are transferring their sexual frustrations and fears onto a pervert. The filmmakers' tone veers between a slightly mischievous irony and the most generous sympathy. The sex scenes are brief, naked, heated, startling. In all, it's a beautifully crafted piece of work that leaves you saddened by the mistakes that decent people make but also hopeful about the possibilities of renewal.—*D.D.* (10/16/06) (In wide release.)

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

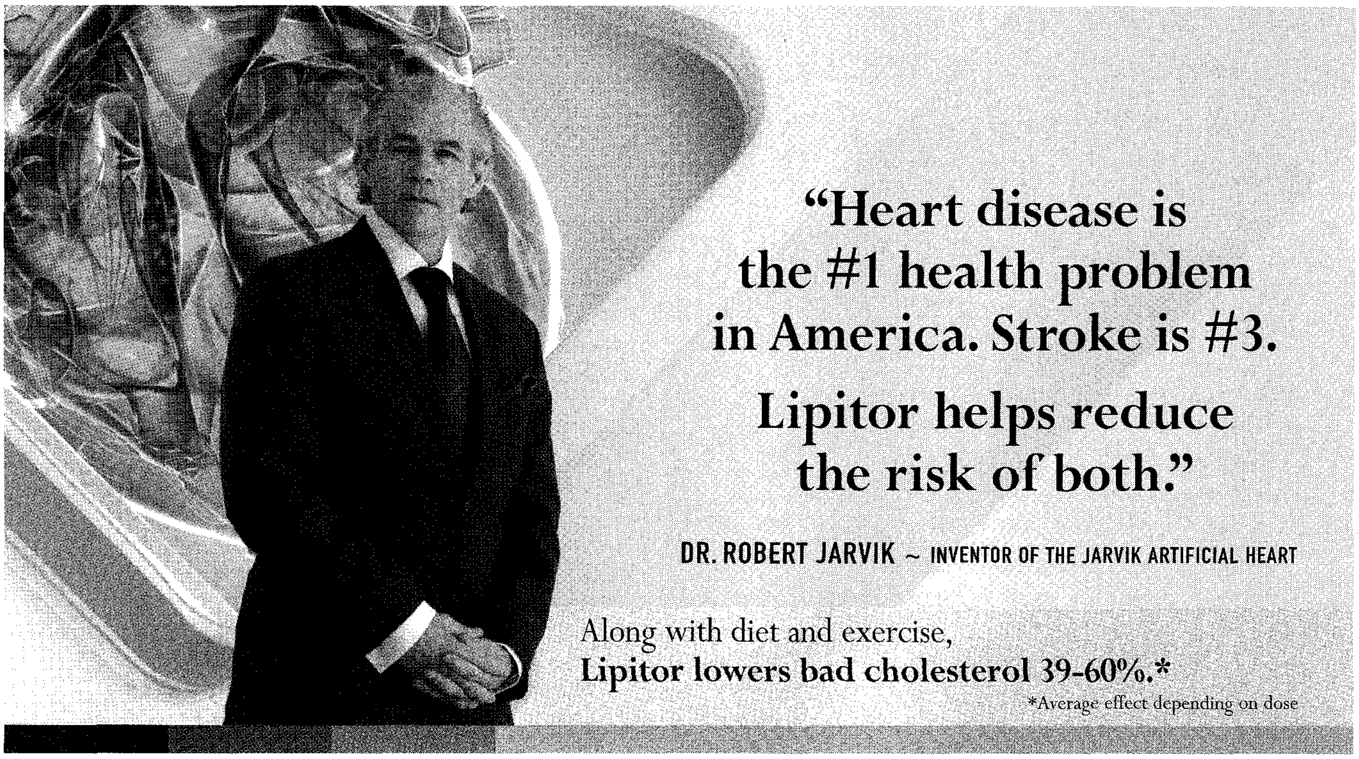
A charming, independently made family comedy about a winner-take-all society—America—that is driving its citizens crazy. Its hero and victim, Richard Hoover (Greg Kinnear), is a motivational speaker who has invented a nine-step program for success. His seven-year-old daughter, Olive (Abigail Breslin), is entering a Little Miss Sunshine contest; his stepson, Dwayne (Paul Dano), has a private dream in which he is a Nietzschean Übermensch; his wife's brother (Steve Carell), whom the family has taken in, is the No. 1 Proust scholar in the country but has made a fool of himself over a male graduate student who has leaped into the bed of the No. 2 Proust scholar. Is winning everything? The writer, Michael Arndt, and the husband-and-wife directing team of Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, narrowly avoid the family-comedy pitfalls of whimsy and mush, but Arndt has a good ear for domestic irritations, and the acting is just tough enough to keep us off balance. With Alan Arkin and Toni Collette as the family's realists.—*D.D.* (7/31/06) (In wide release.)

NOTES ON A SCANDAL

A sensationally nasty and perceptive entertainment about sexual obsession and class. Judi Dench is the sixty-five-ish Barbara, a desperately lonely but formidable teacher in a dreary North London comprehensive school; Cate Blanchett is Sheba, her protégée at the school, a comfortable married bohemian who teaches art and falls in love with a cheeky fifteen-year-old working-class student (Andrew Simpson). Patrick Marber has adapted Zoë Heller's novel, which was written entirely from Barbara's point of view, and the material has now been cast in the third person; the camera observes all the characters objectively while Barbara's acerbic, self-deceiving narration wickedly frames the action. The suspense builds mercilessly as the guileless Sheba, whose placid existence is threatened by her heedless love affair, falls into the clutches of her devouring older “friend.” Philip Glass's swirling music presses the issue with unnecessary insistence. With Bill Nighy as Sheba's outraged husband. Directed by Richard Eyre.—*D.D.* (1/15/07) (In wide release.)

PAN'S LABYRINTH

The Mexican director Guillermo del Toro, who made “The Devil's Backbone,” digs deeper still into his chosen field of the political horror story. The new movie is set in 1944 in a rural Spanish backwater, where Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), a young girl of unnerving poise, travels to meet her new stepfather (Sergi López), who commands a military outpost. One question posed by the film is: who is the monster here? Is it the stepfather, with his creaking gloves and his savage treatment of local republican troublemakers? Could it be Franco, who has brought

"Heart disease is
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*Average effect depending on dose

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION: LIPITOR is a prescription drug. It is used in patients with multiple risk factors for heart disease such as family history, high blood pressure, age, low HDL ('good' cholesterol) or smoking to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke. When diet and exercise alone are not enough, LIPITOR is used along with a low-fat diet and exercise to lower cholesterol.

LIPITOR is not for everyone. It is not for those with liver problems. And it is not for women who are nursing, pregnant or may become pregnant. If you take LIPITOR, tell your doctor if you feel any new muscle pain or weakness. This could be a sign of rare but serious muscle side effects.

Tell your doctor about all of the medicines you take. This may help avoid serious drug interactions. Your doctor should do blood tests to check your liver function before and during treatment and may adjust your dose. The most common side effects are gas, constipation, stomach pain and heartburn. They tend to be mild and often go away.

Please see additional important information on next page.

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IMPORTANT FACTS

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LOWERING YOUR HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High cholesterol is more than just a number, it's a risk factor that should not be ignored. If your doctor said you have high cholesterol, you may be at an increased risk for heart attack. But the good news is, you can take steps to lower your cholesterol.

With the help of your doctor and a cholesterol-lowering medicine like LIPITOR, along with diet and exercise, you could be on your way to lowering your cholesterol.

Ready to start eating right and exercising more? Talk to your doctor and visit the American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org.

WHO IS LIPITOR FOR?

Who can take LIPITOR:
- People who cannot lower their cholesterol enough with diet and exercise
- Adults and children over 10

Who should NOT take LIPITOR:
- Women who are pregnant, may be pregnant, or may become pregnant. LIPITOR may harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant, stop LIPITOR and call your doctor right away.
- Women who are breast-feeding. LIPITOR can pass into your breast milk and may harm your baby.
- People with liver problems
- People allergic to anything in LIPITOR

BEFORE YOU START LIPITOR

Tell your doctor:
- About all medications you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements
- If you have muscle aches or weakness
- If you drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day
- If you have diabetes or kidney problems
- If you have a thyroid problem

ABOUT LIPITOR

LIPITOR is a prescription medicine. Along with diet and exercise, it lowers "bad" cholesterol in your blood. It can also raise "good" cholesterol (HDL-C).

LIPITOR can lower the risk of heart attack or stroke in patients who have risk factors for heart disease such as:
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- diabetes with risk factor such as eye problems, kidney problems, smoking, or high blood pressure

LP278791-F

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Serious side effects in a small number of people:
- **Muscle problems** that can lead to kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your chance for muscle problems is higher if you take certain other medicines with LIPITOR.
- **Liver problems**. Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start LIPITOR and while you are taking it.

Symptoms of muscle or liver problems include:
- Unexplained muscle weakness or pain, especially if you have a fever or feel very tired
- Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
- Brown or dark-colored urine
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow

If you have these symptoms, call your doctor right away.

The most common side effects of LIPITOR are:
- Headache
- Diarrhea, gas
- Rash
- Constipation
- Upset stomach and stomach pain
- Muscle and joint pain

Side effects are usually mild and may go away by themselves. Fewer than 3 people out of 100 stopped taking LIPITOR because of side effects.

HOW TO TAKE LIPITOR

Do:
- Take LIPITOR as prescribed by your doctor.
- Try to eat heart-healthy foods while you take LIPITOR.
- Take LIPITOR at any time of day, with or without food.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. But if it has been more than 12 hours since your missed dose, wait. Take the next dose at your regular time.

Don't:
- Do not change or stop your dose before talking to your doctor.
- Do not start new medicines before talking to your doctor.
- Do not give your LIPITOR to other people. It may harm them even if your problems are the same.
- Do not break the tablet.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- Ask your doctor or health care provider.
- Talk to your pharmacist.
- Go to **www.lipitor.com** or call **1-888-LIPITOR**.

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Rx only

the country to this pass? Or is it the creatures—a mixture of animal, vegetable, and alien—that Ofelia meets in a stone labyrinth, and under whose eyes she endures a series of harsh, not to say sadistic, challenges? At times, her adventures are hard to watch, and the whole film works at a pitch of violence that will shock admirers of more placid fantasy. The result is provoking, inventive, and clever to a fault; everything has been planned and thought through with such care that some of the spontaneity has been squeezed from the proceedings. If it lives and breathes, it is largely due to López and to Álex Angulo, who is wonderful in the Chekhovian role of a good doctor. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (1/8/07) (In wide release.)

THE QUEEN
The new Stephen Frears film considers the deadlock, both grieving and comical, that followed the death of the Princess of Wales in 1997. On the one hand, the Queen (Helen Mirren), believing it to be a private matter, stays and broods in Scotland with the Duke of Edinburgh (James Cromwell) and Prince Charles (Alex Jennings). On the other hand, Tony Blair (Michael Sheen), sensing a thirst for public mourning and thus a unique political opportunity, urges Her Majesty to return to London and face down the mob. And so she does; the crux of the drama comes when Mirren turns to the crowd outside Buckingham Palace and, with one smile, quashes any prospect of rebellion. The script, by Peter Morgan, relies largely on well-grounded speculation, and sticklers for accuracy will find the whole thing straying beyond belief; but, thanks to the careful performances, you subscribe all too readily to the movie's suggestion of a divided land—of a Britain caught between the trustworthy stiffness of tradition and a liberalism that is open not just to emotional honesty but to the coarseness of modern excess. With Helen McCrory as a distinctly unceremonious Cherie Blair.—*A.L.* (10/9/06) (In wide release.)

SMOKIN' ACES
A put-on thriller made in a spirit of rabid, itchy, crack-den heartlessness—screw-you nihilism as a joke. Joe Carnahan, the writer-director, sets up a simple situation: every killer in the country—gay neo-Nazis with masks and horns, professional assassins who bite off their own fingertips—is converging on Lake Tahoe to whack Buddy (Aces) Israel (Jeremy Piven), a popular night-club magician whom the Mafia wants dead (the reward: one million dollars). The movie is a scuzz-bag jamboree. What do you do with all these superfluous characters? You kill them off in freaky ways. “Smokin' Aces” has been made with the kind of extreme violence and antic slovenliness that wins a movie the honorific label of “black comedy.” But the only comedy lies in the filmmakers' delusion that they have become mean hipsters pushing through old barriers and joyriding into realms of undreamed-of freedom. Tarantino and others have been there before.—*D.D.* (1/29/07) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

ALPHA DOG: In wide release. **BLOOD AND CHOCOLATE:** In wide release. **FREEDOM WRITERS:** In wide release. **THE HITCHER:** In wide release. **MAFIOSO:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. **STOMP THE YARD:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Kazuo Hara. All films are in Japanese. Jan. 31 and Feb. 4 at 6:30 and Feb. 2-3 at 9:30: “The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On” (†). ♦ Feb. 1 at 6:30 and Feb. 3 at 5:30: “Goodbye CP” (1972). ♦ Feb. 1 at 8:30 and Feb. 4 at 3:15: “A Dedicated Life” (1994). In première. Jan. 31 at 9 and Feb. 1 at 7 and 9: “China Blue” (†). ♦ In revival. Feb. 2 and Feb. 5-6 at 7 and 9 and Feb. 3-4 at 5, 7, and 9: “The Pied Piper” (1972, Jacques Demy).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Feb. 22: Films scored by Ennio Morricone. Feb. 2-3 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: “Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion” (1970, Elio Petri; in Italian). ♦ Feb. 4 at 1:15, 4:20, and 7:30: “Once Upon a Time in the West” (1968, Sergio Leone). ♦ Feb. 5 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: “Arabian Nights” (1974, Pier Paolo Pasolini). ♦ Feb. 6 at 1, 5:30, and 9:40: “The Burglars” (1972, Henri Verneuil; in French). ♦ Feb. 6 at 3:35 and 7:45: “Danger: Diabolik” (†).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Special screening. Feb. 1 at 7: “Days of Glory” (2006, Rachid Bouchareb; in French). ♦ Through Feb. 27: The films of Jean-Pierre Léaud. Feb. 6 at 12:30, 4, and 7: “La Vie de Bohème” (1992, Aki Kaurismäki; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Feb. 2-4 at noon: “Death of a Cyclist” (1955, Juan Antonio Bardem; in Spanish). ♦ “Waverly Midnights.” Feb. 2-3 at midnight: “Infernal Affairs” (2002, Andrew Lau and Alan Mak; in English, Thai, and Cantonese).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—“Still Moving,” films from the museum's collections. Jan. 31-Feb. 1 at 4:30: “Lost in Translation” (2003, Sofia Coppola). ♦ Feb. 5 at 4:30: “The Squaw Man” (1914, Cecil B. De Mille and Oscar C. Apfel; silent). ♦ Films scored by Ennio Morricone. Feb. 1 at 6 and Feb. 2 at 8:30: “The Mission” (1986, Roland Joffé). The Feb. 1 screening will be introduced by Morricone. ♦ Feb. 1 at 8:30: “The Battle of Algiers” (1966, Gillo Pontecorvo; in Arabic and French). ♦ Feb. 2 at 6 and Feb. 5 at 8:30: “U Turn” (1997, Oliver Stone). ♦ Feb. 3 at 2 and Feb. 5 at 6: “Two Mules for Sister Sara” (1970, Don Siegel). ♦ Feb. 3 at 4:30: “Once Upon a Time in the West” (1968, Sergio Leone). ♦ Feb. 4 at 2: “Once Upon a Time in America” (1984, Leone). ♦ “Out of Time,” films about contemporary art. Feb. 1 at 6:30: Short films by Stan Brakhage, including “Deus Ex” (1971). ♦ Feb. 3 at 7:45: “Unfaithfully Yours” (1948, Preston Sturges). ♦ Through March 2: “Documentary Fortnight Expanded.” Feb. 2 at 8:15 and Feb. 4 at 2: “Forever” (2006, Heddy Honigmann). ♦ Feb. 3 at 4:30: “Babooska” (2005, Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel; in Italian). ♦ Feb. 3 at 7 and Feb. 5 at 6:15: “Jaisalmer Ayo! Gateway of the Gypsies” (2004, Peppe Ozan and Melitta Talchaicovsky; in Hindi, Rajasthani, and English). ♦ Feb. 4 at 5:45: “The Pipeline Next Door” (2005, Nino Kirtadze; in English, Georgian, and Russian).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special screening. Feb. 2 at 7:30: “Punching at the Sun” (2006, Tanuj Chopra), introduced by the director. ♦ “Critics Choice: Great Documentaries.” Feb. 3 at 2: “Jazz on a Summer's Day” (1959, Bert Stern), introduced by Gene Seymour. ♦ Feb. 3 at 4 and Feb. 4 at 6:30: “The Last Waltz” (1978, Martin Scorsese). The Feb. 3 screening is introduced by Thelma Adams. ♦ Feb. 3 at 6:30: “X: The Unheard Music” (1986, W. T. Morgan), introduced by Armond White and followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ Feb. 4 at 2: “Original Cast Album—Company” (1970, D. A. Pennebaker), introduced by Jan Stuart and followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ Feb. 4 at 4:30: “East Side Story” (1997, Dana Ranga), introduced by Leah Rozen.

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. Jan. 31-Feb. 6 at 9: “Room 314” (2005, Michael Knowles).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—“Cabaret Cinema.” Feb. 2 at 9:30: “Lost Horizon” (1937, Frank Capra), introduced by Hendrik Hertzberg, of this magazine.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—“Sunshine@Midnight.” Feb. 2-3: “Batman” (1989, Tim Burton).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—In revival. Feb. 4 at 5:15 and Feb. 6 at 6:15: “Animal Crackers” (1930, Victor Heerman) and “Monkey Business” (1931, Norman Z. McLeod).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Special screening. Feb. 1 at 7: “Days of Glory” (2006, Rachid Bouchareb; in French). ♦ Through Feb. 11: The films of Donald Cammell. Feb. 2 at 6:15 and Feb. 4 at 7:30: “Wild Side” (1995; director's cut). ♦ Feb. 2 at 8:30 and Feb. 3 at 5:30: “Performance” (1970) and “Lucifer Ris-

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POP NOTES
PAIRED OFF

There seem to be a lot of male-female duos in business right now; the high-profile White Stripes and Brooklyn's medium-profile Matt & Kim are only two of a growing cohort. This statistical spike must be due partly to coincidence, but technology is likely involved. Computers can be entire studios, whether they're making the music or simply capturing it. Why would a duo go through the hassle of recruiting more members if they've already written a song and want to keep moving?

The Bird and the Bee consists of the singer Inara George and the multi-instrumentalist Greg Kurstin. Both are professionals who have spent years in the record business. George's father was the late Lowell George, the co-founder and lead singer of Little Feat, and Kurstin is a session musician and producer who has worked with the Flaming Lips and Lily Allen. The two met when Kurstin played on George's solo début, in 2005. Apparently drawn together by an appreciation for jazz standards, the Beach Boys, and other relics of the twentieth century, they formed the Bird and the Bee.

Their self-titled début album, on Blue Note records, is a small and sure delight. The music is evenly divided between the glittery, contained sounds of digital devices and traditional instruments like guitars and drums. You can hear nested references to fifties cocktail-lounge instrumentals and sixties girl groups, but none of the songs are kitsch. George has the kind of voice that is in vogue now: light and girly but easily heard, strong in pitch but generally lacking in grit. She hides her strength in dry lyrics that present a narrator who hopes for the best while seeing something less impressive around her: “Cool babies with soft operations holding my hand, throwing coins in my cup / Dusty numbers and public relations tell me to sit there and just shut up.”

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

ing" (1972, Kenneth Anger). ♦ Feb. 3 at 3:30 and Feb. 5 at 4:30 and 8:30: "Duffy" (1968, Robert Parrish). ♦ Feb. 3 at 8:15 and Feb. 6 at 8:30: "White of the Eye" (1987). ♦ Feb. 4 at 5:30 and Feb. 5 at 6:30: "Donald Cammell: The Ultimate Performance" (1998, Kevin Macdonald and Chris Rodley) and "The Argument" (1972/99).

READINGS AND TALKS

JOHN DEANE AND NAN DEANE CANO
The photographer and the writer, who are siblings, discuss their latest book, "Acts of Light: Martha Graham in the Twenty-first Century," accompanied by members of the Martha Graham Dance Company. (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 66th St. Jan. 31 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

TRIBUTE TO GALWAY KINNELL
The poet Kinnell, who was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on February 1, 1927, celebrates his eightieth birthday in Cooper Union's Great Hall. He'll be joined by Robert Bly, Mark Doty, Marie Howe, Yusef Komunyakaa, Sharon Olds, and a number of other writers. (7 E. 7th St. Feb. 1 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

"SUNDAYS AT SUNNY'S"
Brandon Stosuy, the editor of "Up Is Up, But So Is Down: New York's Downtown Literary Scene, 1974-1992," joins contributors to the recently published collection. With Virginia Vitzthum, who will read from her chronicle of Internet dating, "I Love You, Let's Meet." (253 Conover St., Red Hook, Brooklyn. Feb. 4 at 3. For more information, call 718-875-3677.)

"ENTERTAINING SCIENCE"
Roald Hoffmann, a Nobel Prize-winning chemist and writer, brings science to the masses with this monthly event at a Greenwich Village café. On Feb. 4 at 6, he's playing host to "Denmark vs. the Super Bowl," in which the Danish organic chemist Karl Anker Jørgensen, discussing how nature favors one of two mirror-image molecules over the other, will appear at roughly the same time as the nation's most popular television event. With the Danish trumpeter Poul Weis. (Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319.)

"POETS OUT LOUD"
Fordham University's reading series presents Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Kathleen Fraser, Jeanne Heuving, Claudia Keelan, Alicia Ostriker, and Leslie Scalapino, who will offer selections from their contributions to "Innovative Women Poets: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry and Interviews." (113 W. 60th St. Feb. 5 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

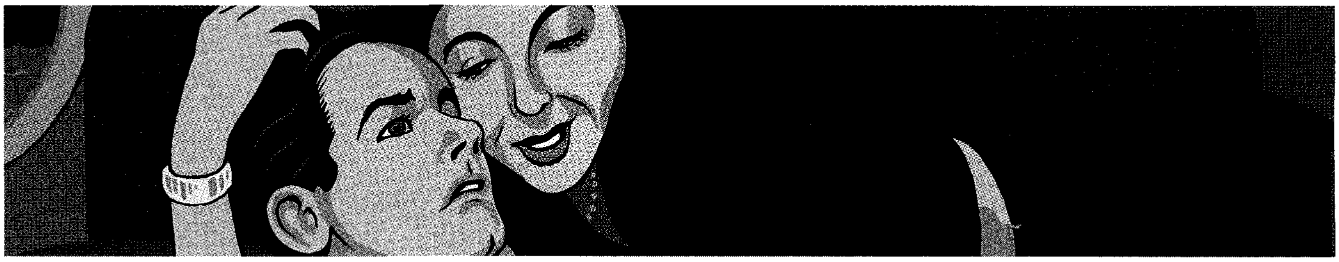
ROBERT PINSKY
The former United States Poet Laureate talks about the work of Robert Frost and William Carlos Williams. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. Feb. 6 at 7. Tickets at the door.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"PVC: POETRY VS. COMEDY"
This monthly variety show pits poets against comedians in a lighthearted slam-style competition. On Jan. 31 at 8, the bards are Shane Luitjens, Zaedryn Meade, and Thad Rutkowski, and the jesters include Brandy Barber, Michelle Buteau, and Luke Thayer. The host is the standup comedian and rapper Carolyn Castiglia. (The Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. 212-614-0505.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
The image of the indie-rock femme fatale Cat Power (otherwise known as Chan Marshall) is currently being projected onto the façade of the museum as a part of Doug Aitken's public-art project "Sleepwalkers." On Feb. 2, starting at 9, the occasionally bashful Southern singer performs during a "PopRally," which features the street drummers Ryan Donowho and Hishan Bharoocha and includes storytelling by Melissa Plaut. (11 W. 53rd St. 212-708-9400.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Christie's closes the month with a windswept sale of maritime art (Jan. 31), featuring several works by the highly prized (and priced) British painter Montague Dawson, along with sailors' valentines, ship models, and a lovely nineteenth-century polychrome wood figurehead that once graced the prow of the bark Edinburgh (in the form of a shapely, blushing woman). After a few days of quiet, it's time for a House Sale of moderately priced furniture and decorations (Feb. 6-7). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Swann** unveils its new department devoted to African-American fine art at an auction (on Feb. 6) of more than two hundred prints, paintings, collages, and sculptures. Headlining the sale is a portfolio of screen prints by Jacob Lawrence: "The Legend of John Brown," a sequence that depicts the story of the radical abolitionist whose exploits came to an abrupt end at Harpers Ferry. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ **Phillips's** selling exhibition of video portraits by the theatre and opera director Robert Wilson continues through Feb. 14. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)



MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BEST OF BRITISH
Feb. 11-25

David Finckel and Wu Han's début season at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center continues with "An English Musical Renaissance," which offers neglected chamber works by such composers as Walton, Ireland, and Bridge. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

MOVIES
IT'S IN THE CARDS
Feb. 14

In "Bambi vs. Godzilla," his new book about the film business, David Mamet calls "The Lady Eve," Preston Sturges's 1941 comedy, "a perfect movie." Henry Fonda and Barbara Stanwyck star as a nerdy heir and a con artist who, like most couples, get together through a series of charmingly implausible circumstances. BAM is screening it as part of a Valentine's Day program that includes dinner. (718-636-4100.)

ART
SHE'S THE BOSS
Feb. 23-June 6

This year, the English artist Tacita Dean joins the small but impressive roster of winners of the biannual Hugo Boss Prize in contemporary art. In celebration, an installation of her photographs and two of her 16-mm. films will be at the Guggenheim. (212-423-3500.)

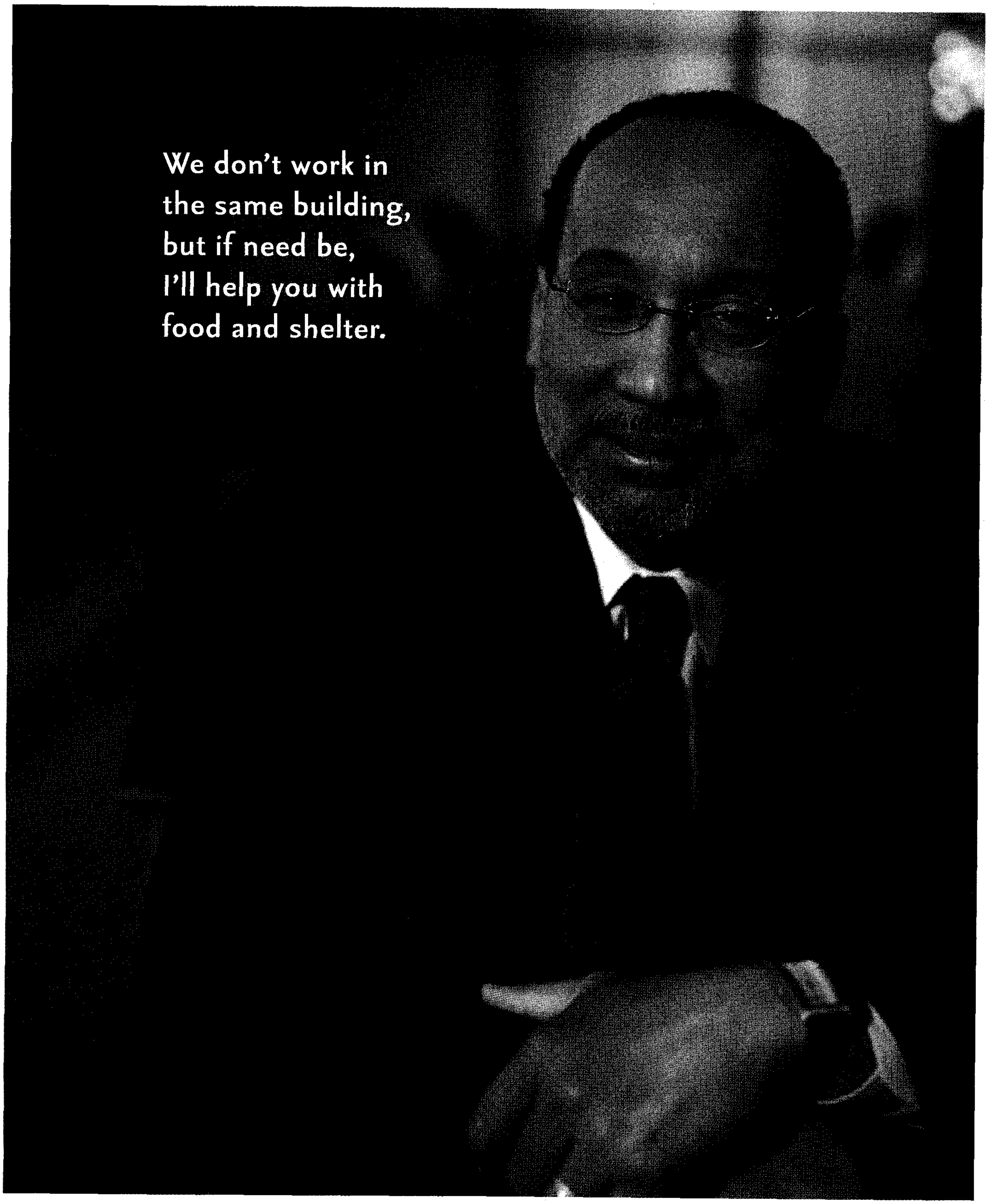
THE THEATRE
WHODUNIT
Feb. 27

The legendary musical-theatre duo John Kander and Fred Ebb were still working on their new show, "Curtains," when Ebb died, in 2004. Kander finished the musical, a backstage murder mystery set in 1959, and now it's coming to Broadway, with David Hyde Pierce as a toe-tapping detective. (212-239-6200.)

NIGHT LIFE
BAKER'S DOZEN
March 22-April 7

A sure sign that winter is winding down is the return of the Allman Brothers Band to the Beacon Theatre, the site of the Southern rockers' annual spring residency. This year, the band will play thirteen shows in late March and early April. (212-307-7171.)

Henry Fonda and Barbara Stanwyck star in Preston Sturges's "The Lady Eve."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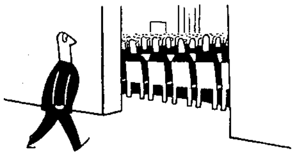
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

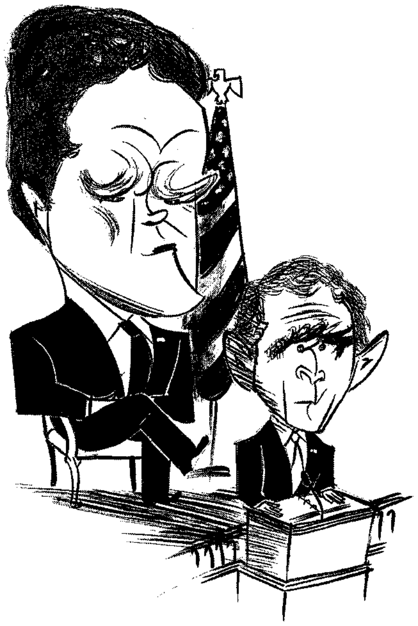
COMMENT
WEBBCAST



For more than forty years, it has been the custom for the President's State of the Union address to be followed by a formal televised response. In 1966, the leaders of the Republican minority in Congress, the florid Senator Everett Dirksen and the stolid Representative Gerald Ford, appointed themselves to deliver the first of these, after one of Lyndon Johnson's lordly extravaganzas. The Ev and Jerry Show, though charming in a ramshackle way, was less than a monster hit, and nearly all the subsequent post-SOTU presentations have likewise been little noted nor long remembered. Senator Bob Dole, with characteristic bleak wit, evaluated his response to President Clinton's 1996 address thusly: "I gave a fireside chat the other night, and the fire went out." It was different this time. This time the fire was on, and it was the rebuttal that had something truthful to say about the state of the union.

James Webb is a writer, the highly acclaimed author of six densely textured novels of men in battle. As of last Tuesday evening he had been a United States senator for all of twenty days. He was an unusual choice to deliver the Democrats' reply to President Bush's address, and, as it turned out, a canny one. Normally, the replier speeds through a miniature of the traditional SOTU laundry list, administering quick shoulder massages to as many interest groups as possible. Webb, pugnacious of temperament, chose instead to use his nine minutes to speak of "two areas where our respective parties have largely stood in contradiction." The first was the ballooning of economic inequality at home. The second was Iraq, where, he said,

> this country has patiently endured a mismanaged war for nearly four years. Many, including myself, warned even before the war began that it was unnecessary, that it would take our energy and attention away from the larger war against terrorism, and that invading and occupying Iraq would leave us strategically vulnerable in the most violent and turbulent corner of the world.



Webb was able to speak bluntly ("The President took us into this war recklessly") not only because he writes that way but also on account of a Kevlar résumé. In addition to having served—in the Reagan Administration, no less—as Secretary of the Navy, he is a decorated Marine combat veteran of the Vietnam War. So is his brother. His father flew B-29s during the Second World War. His son is a marine, too, now serving in Iraq. Mentioning that history, Webb noted that he and his kin, like many other soldiers,

> trusted the judgment of our national leaders. . . . We owed them our loyalty, as Americans, and we gave it. But they owed us sound judgment, clear thinking, concern for our welfare, a guarantee that the threat to our country was equal to the price we might be called upon to pay in defending it.

None of that, he made plain, has been forthcoming from the present Administration.

As for Bush's speech, its principal merit was that it provided a pretext for Webb's. The President began with some graceful words for Nancy Pelosi, the new (and first female) Speaker of the House, and then spoiled the effect with a reflexive slur: "I congratulate the Democrat majority." ("Democratic majority" were the words on his teleprompter, but he apparently couldn't help himself.) Still, he went easy on the social-issue red meat: no stem cells this time, no abortion, no gay marriage. Instead, he served up a thin menu of, so to speak, Democrat veggies: rhetorical recognition that health care, education, and energy are problems, with a side dish of

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

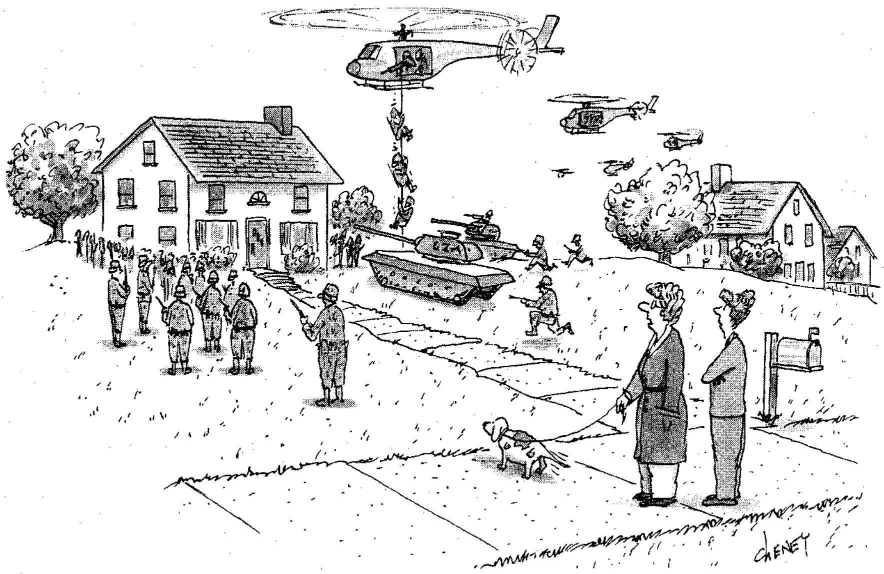
timid proposals, mostly drawn from the conservative think-tank cookbook, that the new Congress is sure to send back to the kitchen. What had been heralded in advance as a dramatic breakthrough on global warming turned out to be a half-sentence assurance that “technologies” would “help us to confront the serious challenge of global climate change.” He concluded with the traditional (since Reagan) introduction of model citizens up in the gallery, including Julie Aigner-Clark, the founder (with her husband, a generous donor to Republican campaigns) of the Baby Einstein Company. The President did not explain how Aigner-Clark, whose business sells “developmental” videos for infants, which the American Academy of Pediatrics has dismissed as at best valueless, exemplifies what he called “the heroic kindness, courage, and self-sacrifice of the American people.” Maybe it was just another Bush SOTU puzzler, like last year’s warning against “human-animal hybrids.” (To be fair, America remains proudly centaur-free.)

Between the veggies and Baby Einstein fell the shadow: Iraq. The President pointed to his “new strategy,” begged Congress and the country “to give it a chance to work,” and added, “Whatever you voted for, you did not vote for failure.”

True, but not true enough. Last November, the voters didn’t endorse failure—they simply acknowledged it. And they certainly didn’t vote for escalation, which is what Bush is giving them. With this address, in conjunction with his January 10th “new way forward” speech, the President has taken full ownership of the Iraq war. Four years ago, many were complicit to one degree or another in the decision to invade, including a bipartisan majority in Congress and the governments of Britain and other members of the “coalition.” That is no longer so. The generals on the scene, who resisted Bush’s “surge,” have been removed. The Senate is on the point of passing a resolution of disapproval. The coalition is crumbling, and its British component is likely to ratchet itself down once Tony Blair leaves office. Senator John McCain, who a month ago passionately warned against a surge of fewer than thirty thousand troops, now supports a surge of twenty thousand—largely because, he says, the new American commander in Iraq, David Petraeus, thinks it has a chance of working. But Petraeus conceded, in testimony last Tuesday before the Senate Armed Services Committee, that the new troop levels fall short of his own previous estimate of what would be necessary. Soldiers follow orders, and General Petraeus has his.

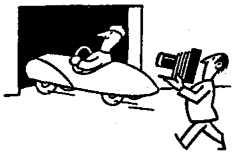
In a Saturday radio talk before the State of the Union address, the President said, “Those who refuse to give this plan a chance to work have an obligation to offer an alternative that has a better chance for success.” The day after the address, Vice-President Cheney—in an instantly notorious CNN interview in which he dismissed talk of blunders as “hogwash”—said, “The critics have not suggested a policy.” *That* is hogwash. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is in its fourth week of hearing such suggestions. The Iraq Study Group has a plan. Senator Joseph Biden and Leslie Gelb have a plan. The Center for American Progress has a plan. But what all their plans have in common is that they recognize that what remains is the search for the least bad of a bad bunch of options. Implicitly, they recognize that Bush’s policy—and, therefore, Bush—is a failure. And so, rather than looking for a policy that might be within our means and might mitigate the disaster, Bush is betting all his chips—all our chips—on the only choice that allows him the fantasy that in the end people will say: Bush was right. He is sending twenty thousand because twenty thousand is all he has. Next to nothing in the way of ground forces remains for other contingencies. His Presidency and his “legacy” are in ruins anyway, so he imagines he has nothing to lose. If only that were true of the rest of us.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*



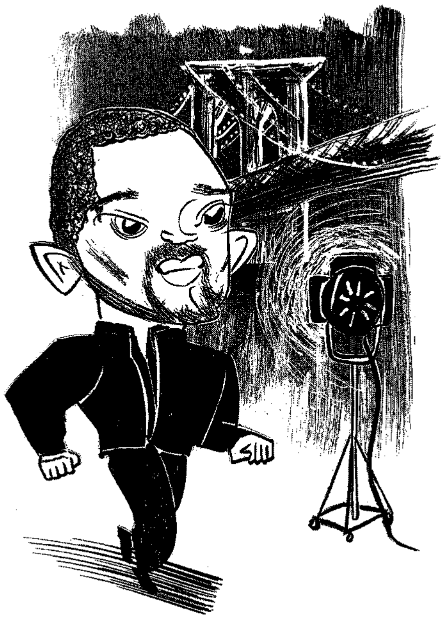
“I heard they’re trying to bring democracy to a marriage.”

THE PICTURES
TAKING DOVER STREET



Like residents of other photogenic parts of the city, people who live between the Brooklyn Bridge and the South Street Seaport have become accustomed to seeing their blocks turned into movie sets. Film trucks idle day and night in the street; there’s no parking; klieg lights illuminate the bedroom windows; and, as one resident put it the other day, “arrogant guys with a thug attitude tell you to stay off your own sidewalk.”

Even by local standards, last Tuesday’s shoot, for “I Am Legend,” a forthcoming Will Smith disaster movie, was remarkable. “I Am Legend” is, in terms of size, length, and logistics, one of the most ambitious location shoots that has ever taken place in the city. Since shooting began, in October, “Legend” has been establishing a new precedent for the aggressive takeover of public space. The movie camped out in Washington Square Park for weeks in October and November, restricting access for most of that time, and occasionally setting off loud explosions in the wee hours. Tuesday night was the first of six night shoots on Dover Street, near the Seaport. In addition to simulated gridlock on Dover, there was to be a panicked evacuation across South Street, and a Black Hawk helicopter was to land on a two-hundred-foot barge in the East River.



Will Smith

At 5 P.M., more than a thousand extras were waiting in two huge heated tents that had been set up in a lot near some basketball courts. There were men and women of all ages, and lots of kids, some of whom were doing their homework at long wooden tables. The film is set in a plague-ridden Manhattan; the infected extras had hectic splotches of red makeup on their faces. Some of the extras (or "background artists," as they were referred to by the P.A.s) were making seven dollars and fifty cents an hour, and would be working well past midnight. On Tuesday, the temperature was thirty-four degrees; by Friday it would be in the teens.

At quarter past five, a P.A. began going around in the tents, making sure that the evacuees had their motivations down. "O.K., people, listen up," he yelled through a megaphone. "You are tired. You're on the verge of despair. But you're not panicked—not at first. Later, you panic."

The fact that the operation was happening at all, especially in a neighborhood that still recalls the real panic and evacuation of five years ago, is a testament to the extraordinary determination of the Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre, and Broadcasting. Katherine Oliver, the commissioner of the Film Office, says that her agency solicits studios long before production decisions have been made, in the hope of luring films to New York. She noted that earlier drafts of "I Am Legend" had been set in Los Angeles, and said, "I'd like to think we had something to do with that change." Oliver's office also offers what it calls a "Concierge Service," to ease the potential headaches involved in restricting traffic, blowing up buildings, and simulating mass panic in the streets; it will assist in arranging permits, complimentary use of the N.Y.P.D.'s special Movie and TV Unit, location scouting, budget analysis, marketing, and, best of all, free access to city landmarks. "The Mayor is all about customer service, and that's what we try to provide," Oliver said. "Vanilla Sky" was allowed to shut down Times Square for three hours, and "The Interpreter" filmed inside the U.N.'s Security Council chamber (the director, Sydney Pollack, met with Kofi Annan). The state and the city also offer tax credits for expenses—lighting, props, catering—incurred in New York.

By five-thirty, the invasion was under way. The evacuees filled Dover Street, where the crew had constructed a traffic jam, placing cars slightly askew. By six, the fake traffic jam was causing a real one on South Street. The people in the real one looked much more annoyed.

A crew member shouted, "Stand by!"

"Oh, here we go," a young extra said. "Our big moment."

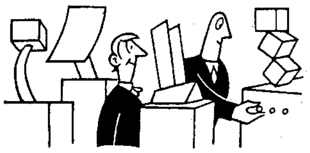
"Action!"

Some officials had been concerned that the feigned panic might cause actual panic. And there was always the remote possibility that some terrorist would use the manufactured commotion as a cover to create the real thing. But, in the end, the only frisson of pandemonium came when Will Smith appeared on Dover Street, weaving through traffic to get to the barge with a little girl in his arms.

A French tourist let out a scream. "*Incroyable!*"

—*John Seabrook*

VISITING ARTIST DEPT.
OBJETS



Last fall, Marc Newson designed a surfboard for Garrett McNamara, the rex of big-wave tow-surfing. McNamara took the board—a silvery projectile, fashioned from hollow nickel—to Tahiti, wiped out at Teahupo'o, and considered it a goner. "The next day, driving to the airport," Newson said recently, "he spotted a massive Polynesian dude with this shiny piece of space junk under his arm." The board, it turned out, had washed up fifteen miles down the beach. Reclaimed, with a few dings and a fluorescent-pink baggage tag still attached, it was being readied, the other day, as part of an exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery, the first in New York of Newson's work.

The show, which runs until March, marks a departure for Gagosian, in that it showcases a designer rather than an artist (though this traditional distinction is becoming increasingly moot). Purists may fret that the gift shop is taking over the museum, but enterprising dealers, like race-car drivers, are happy to draft on the momentum: just across West Twenty-fourth Street, for example, Sebastian + Barquet is offering a Lockheed Lounge—Newson's rather unloungeable riveted steel chair from 1986—for two and a half million dollars. Over at Gagosian, an unused edition of the nickel surfboard will go for around a hundred thousand. Standing near a pile of work gloves and tape measures, three days before the opening, Newson surveyed the room. It was beginning to fill up with sleek furniture. "Working, it sort of feels like you're in the Army half the time," he said. (His clients have included Nike, Ford, Dom Pérignon, and Qantas Airways.) "These projects are what I do when no one's breathing down my neck."

Newson, a rough-and-tumble party boy from Sydney, is forty-three. He spent his pre-adolescent years in South Korea, trained as a jeweller and sculptor, and landed, for a spell, in Tokyo. His first break came by chance, when his girlfriend and the entrepreneur Teruo Kurosaki shared an umbrella. In red socks, fringed suède moccasins, and—from his G-Star clothing line—a hoodie printed with a photograph of the interior of a Concorde and a pair of spent cargo pants ("I'm going to have to have them surgically removed soon"), Newson posed a contradiction: a mellow nomad fuelled by a flinty testosteronal intensity. "My inspiration is anger," he said. "Seeing things and getting pissed off and just going, 'It's so awful. Why does it have to be like that?' " A frequent trigger of his ire is mobile phones. "At best, they're O.K. At worst, they're despicable. They all just deserve to go down in flames!"

Newson has designed a phone, called Talby, after a character in the science-fiction movie "Dark Star." As thin as a matchbook and resembling a remote control, it is available only in Japan. Here, Newson makes do with a Samsung. Fiddling with its buttons, he offered the opinion that phones ought to be put on cameras instead of cameras on phones. "This thing's going through the window in a month," he said.

Squatting on his haunches, he stuck his head beneath a table. It was glossy and brown; extruding from the underside was a stylized fin that recalled the keel of a boat. Newson explained that the piece was made from "a precursor to fibreglass" called Micarta, of which he is using one of the world's last remaining stockpiles. "I could see it bowing in the middle," he said, adjusting the top, "so I have to get it completely flat." A couple of workmen prepared to move the table, which costs a hundred and ninety thousand dollars, onto a platform. "Don't grab it from the ends," Newson said. They placed it next to a Micarta desk, which had shallow, curvy indentations on top, like a tray for a Jetson's TV dinner.

David Adjaye, the architect, strolled in for an early peek. He stopped and stared at a blocky object, with honeycombed holes—it looked like a large metallic loofah. Its official name is Random Pak Chair, but Newson calls it "the ultimate science project."

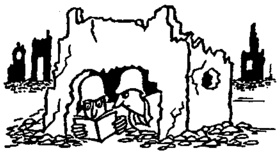
Newson shook Adjaye's hand and began to recount how he made the piece. "It would take almost a day to explain," he said. "We grew it in a tank, in an electrolytic bath. It was really almost obnoxious." Newson is taken seriously enough, by people who take these things seriously, that the show's organizer refers to this chair as "the Random Pak work."

Adjaye drifted out of the gallery, to be replaced by other modish congratulators. "We met in Miami at, like, two o'clock in the morning," one woman said, greeting Newson. They compared notes on jet lag. And on: "Where is your main house?" "Which arrondissement?" "Well, Miuccia *is* an old Communist."

Later, Newson admitted that he wasn't really all that jet-lagged; he was just trying to make conversation. His idea of a perfect object, he said, is an egg.

—*Lauren Collins*

END IS NEAR DEPT.
PEP TALK



"Apocalypse Not" was the informal title given to a conference held last week at Trinity Church that was attended by four hundred-odd religious leaders and that took as its subject the end of the world as envisioned in the Book of Revelation. "We're floundering on this issue," said Professor Mark Richardson, the senior theological adviser at Trinity Institute, at a cocktail party held after the first day's lectures. Richardson explained that Episcopalians are not much given to pondering the Apocalypse, while fundamentalist Christians do nothing but. The conference—officially titled "God's Unfinished Future: Why It Matters Now"—was intended to explore ways to address a Christian laity easily seduced by the lurid horrors of the "Left Behind" fictional series, which imagines a contemporary Rapture, and of which more than forty-three million copies have been sold. "I don't think I have the stomach for those books," Richardson said.

An appetite for smoked-salmon canapés and pinot noir was all that was required of guests at the evening's gathering, which was held at Trinity's rectory, a town house on Charlton Street that was built by John Jacob Astor in 1826 and was acquired by the church in 2004, for five and a half million dollars. It joins Trinity's considerable portfolio—the church owns six million square feet of office space between Houston and Canal Streets. Above the dining-room fireplace hangs a portrait of the house's current occupant, the Reverend Dr. Jim Cooper, by Thomas Loepp. It depicts him standing on Wall Street with the church and its environs in the background. "There are our dog and cat, and there's my buddy Mohammed, with his hot-dog cart," Cooper said.

In a lecture, "Prophecy, End-Times, and American Apocalypse: Reclaiming Hope for Our World," Barbara Rossing, a New Testament scholar at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, suggested, "We need a novel whose heroes are rooted on the earth, living in sustainable communities, maybe practicing Permaculture gardening." Another perspective on the end that may or may not be nigh was provided by Jürgen Moltmann, an octogenarian theologian from Tübingen, Germany, who sat in a wing chair in the rector's parlor, glass of wine in hand, and dismissed current anxieties about environmental apocalypse—widely held among secularists who dismiss the Rapture as nothing more than a song by Blondie—as misplaced. "One should not speak about the end of the world if what one means is the end of our culture," Professor Moltmann said, pointing out that the dinosaurs may have been extinguished but life on earth went on. "If you are mankind-centered, it's a catastrophe; but if you are life-centered it is that while one life ends, another begins." This perspective may bring some comfort to the managers of Trinity's real-estate holdings, several of which FEMA's flood map of New York places decisively underwater.

Apocalyptic thinking, the guests agreed, tends to flourish among populations who consider themselves socially and culturally disadvantaged. "Baptists are always talking about it," said Peter Gomes, the Harvard professor and Baptist minister. "It usually comes from people who have nothing to lose. Episcopalians are generally thought of as folk who have a higher investment in the present." The conferees' faith in the security of the present might have been mildly shaken that very morning, by a fire in the service elevator of Trinity's administrative building. But the Fire Department ultimately determined that all was well, and all manner of things would be well. "It was not the Apocalypse, which was very nice," Gomes said. "It was the Apocalypse postponed."

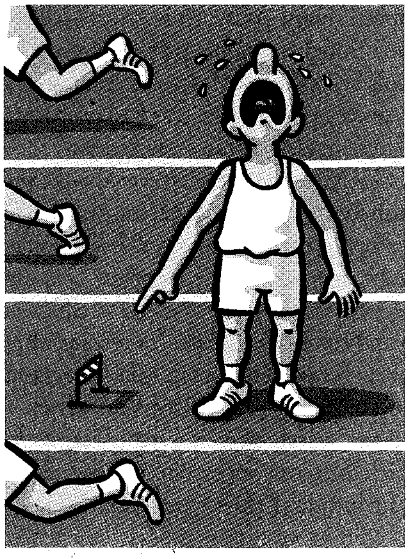
—*Rebecca Mead*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
OVER THERE

These look like fat years on Wall Street. In 2006, the city's biggest financial firms made more than thirty billion dollars in profits. Trading volume on the major exchanges is climbing, while the merger market is booming. And bankers and traders have reaped the benefits, earning close to twenty-five billion dollars in bonuses last year. Yet over the past few months, amid this bounty, a chorus of Cassandras has emerged. "The United States is losing its leading competitive position," a private-sector commission on capital markets said in a November report, and last week Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Senator Charles Schumer released a study arguing that New York City's financial dominance was being eroded, thus putting tens of billions of dollars and tens of thousands of jobs at risk. These reports argue that overzealous regulation—as epitomized by the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, the anti-fraud law passed after the Enron and WorldCom scandals—is making the U.S. an increasingly unalluring place to do business. Unless such regulatory excesses are curbed, they say, New York will soon lose its position as the world's financial capital.

What the New York report calls "the most dramatic illustration" of this slide toward disaster is a statistic that may seem rather esoteric: in recent years, the number of foreign companies choosing to go public in New York has plummeted, with Europe and Asia snapping up much of the business. America's share of so-called "global I.P.O.s" is now only a third of what it was in 2001, and in 2005 twenty-four of the world's twenty-five biggest I.P.O.s were held abroad. In other words, foreign companies, wary of our arduous regulations, are supposedly shunning America. And this signals a grim future, in which foreign firms stay away and, eventually, American companies may abandon the New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq to list their shares elsewhere.

To businessmen weary of compliance officers and internal controls, this seems like a compelling narrative. But it's a radically oversimplified explanation of what's been happening. To begin with, many of the world's biggest I.P.O.s in recent years have been privatizations of state-owned companies in Europe and China, which for political reasons were never likely to happen in the U.S. Also, corporate executives prefer to take their companies public in bull markets, which improves their chances of getting a high price for their shares, and foreign markets have lately done better than the U.S. market. London and Hong Kong are also cheaper than New York: the commissions that investment banks charge to take companies public there can be about half what they are in the U.S. More broadly, globalization—a force that Wall Streeters applaud when it comes to textile plants and call centers—has increased competition. Many foreign exchanges, like Hong Kong's, are now far more liquid and open, and they also have much tougher regulations (often modelled, ironically enough, on those of the U.S.) than they once did. All this has made investors more willing to invest in them. Their market share has naturally increased as a result, particularly since, even in a global economy, companies prefer to list their shares closer to home.



Once you control for these factors, it becomes hard to find anything other than anecdotal evidence that regulations are doing serious damage to New York's ability to attract foreign I.P.O.s. More important, it's far from clear that a decline in foreign I.P.O.s would be a sign of future disaster anyway. After all, what matters to the fundamental health of an economy is its ability to attract capital and investors, not foreign listings. And there is no evidence that America's attractiveness to investors has diminished. Its share of global stock-market activity in 2005 was actually three points higher than it had been a decade earlier. In the same period, the market capitalizations of the New York exchanges rose almost twice as fast as the market cap of the London Stock Exchange. And, according to the New York report, if you look at the annual growth in equities—which is what Sarbanes-Oxley would presumably be a drag on—you find something unexpected: from 2001 to 2005, the U.S. market grew significantly faster than that of Europe or the U.K. Does that really look like an industry crippled by regulation?

There's no doubt that Sarbanes-Oxley is an imperfect piece of legislation, but it is not a harbinger of doom for America's capital markets, and we should be skeptical of any analysis that says it is. Wall Street, after all, has greeted practically every important market regulation introduced in this century with howls of dismay and predictions of disaster. In 1934, the head of the New York Stock Exchange told Congress that if the Securities Exchange Act, which became the foundation of market regulation in the U.S., was made law there was a chance that stock trading in the U.S. would be "entirely destroyed." Needless to say, it wasn't. In 1975, when the S.E.C. abolished fixed commissions, the Street claimed that its business would be demolished. Instead, after transaction costs fell, trading volume shot up. And in 2000, when the S.E.C. required companies to disclose material information to all investors, rather than just to insiders, we were told that this would strangle the flow of information to the market and make stock prices swing wildly. But, as numerous academic studies have found, it has actually done the opposite. Maybe this time the doomsayers are right. But we need a lot more proof than we've been shown so far to believe that the wolf is really at the door.

—*James Surowiecki*

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ANNALS OF LAW

GOOGLE'S MOON SHOT

The quest for the universal library.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

Every weekday, a truck pulls up to the Cecil H. Green Library, on the campus of Stanford University, and collects at least a thousand books, which are taken to an undisclosed location and scanned, page by page, into an enormous database being created by Google. The company is also retrieving books from libraries at several other leading universities, including Harvard and Oxford, as well as the New York Public Library. At the University of Michigan, Google's original partner in Google Book Search, tens of thousands of books are processed each week on the company's custom-made scanning equipment.

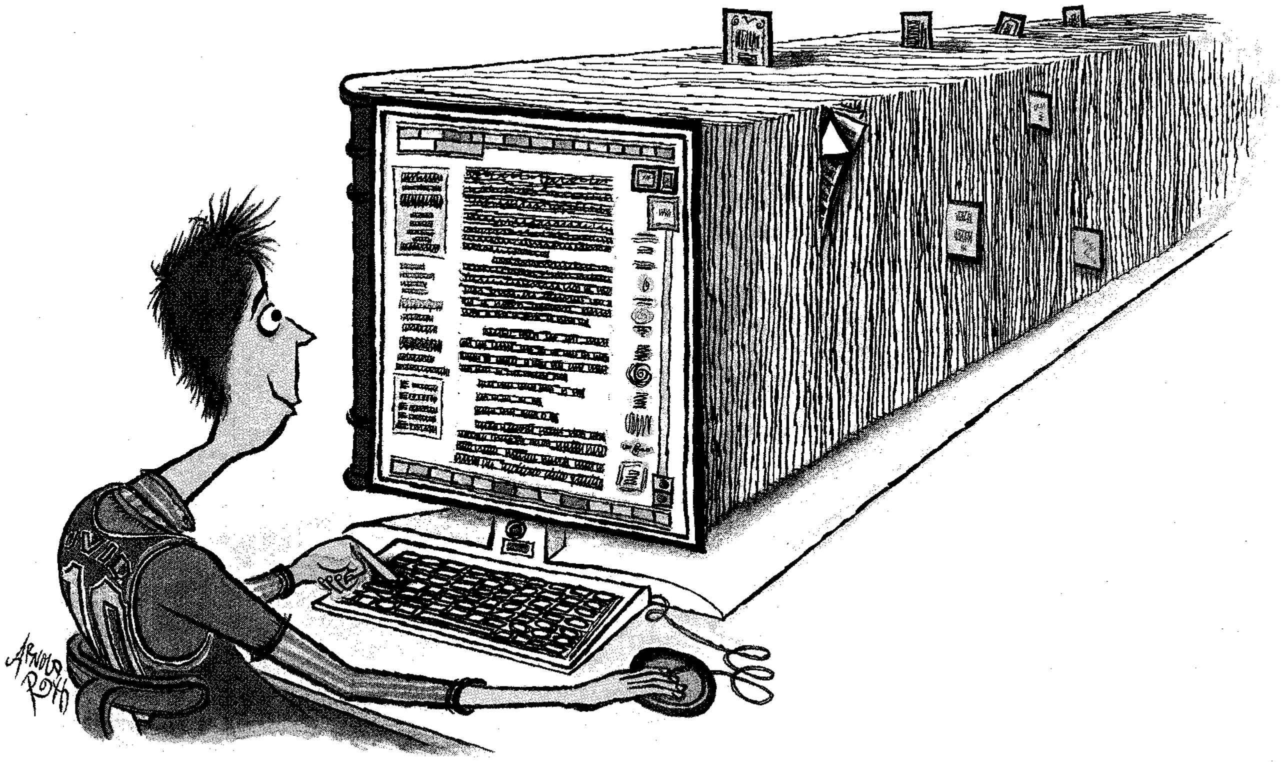
Google intends to scan every book ever published, and to make the full texts searchable, in the same way that Web sites can be searched on the company's engine at google.com. At the books site, which is up and running in a beta (or testing) version, at books.google.com, you can enter a word or phrase—say, Ahab and whale—and the search returns a list of works in which the terms appear, in this case nearly eight hundred titles, including numerous editions of Herman Melville's novel. Clicking on "Moby-Dick, or The Whale" calls up Chapter 28, in which Ahab is introduced. You can scroll through the chapter, search for other terms that appear in the book, and compare it with other editions. Google won't say how many books are in its database, but the site's value as a research tool is apparent; on it you can find a history of Urdu newspapers, an 1892 edition of Jane Austen's letters, several guides to writing haiku, and a Harvard alumni directory from 1919.

No one really knows how many books there are. The most volumes listed in any catalogue is thirty-two million, the number in WorldCat, a database of titles from more than twenty-five thousand libraries around the world. Google aims to scan at least that many. "We think that we can do it all inside of ten years," Marissa Mayer, a vice-president at Google who is in charge of the books project, said recently, at the company's headquarters, in Mountain View, California. "It's mind-boggling to me, how close it is. I think of Google Books as our moon shot."

Google's is not the only book-scanning venture. Amazon has digitized hundreds of thousands of the books it sells, and allows users to search the texts; Carnegie Mellon is hosting a project called the Universal Library, which so far has scanned nearly a million and a half books; the Open Content Alliance, a consortium that includes Microsoft, Yahoo, and several major libraries, is also scanning thousands of books; and there are many smaller projects in various stages of development. Still, only Google has embarked on a project of a scale commensurate with its corporate philosophy: "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

In part because of that ambition, Google's endeavor is encountering opposition. A federal court in New York is considering two challenges to the project, one brought by several writers and the Authors Guild, the other by a group of publishers, who are also, curiously, partners in Google Book Search. Both sets of plaintiffs claim that the library component of the project violates copyright law. Like most federal lawsuits, these cases appear likely to be settled before they go to trial, and the terms of any such deal will shape the future of digital books. Google, in an effort to put the lawsuits behind it, may agree to pay the plaintiffs more than a court would require; but, by doing so, the company would discourage potential competitors. To put it another way, being taken to court and charged with copyright infringement on a large scale might be the best thing that ever happens to Google's foray into the printed word.

Though Google has more than ten thousand employees—about fifty new ones are hired each week—and a market capitalization of more than a hundred and fifty billion dollars, the company cultivates the air of a college campus at its headquarters, in Silicon Valley. Now and then, there are self-consciously wacky stunts, like Pajama Day, which happened to take place when I visited. (The event was to be madcap within reason; supervisors were told to convey the message that “pajamas means ‘pajamas,’ not ‘what you sleep in.’ ”) When I met with Sergey Brin, a co-founder of Google, he was wearing bright-blue p.j.s, with the company’s logo stitched on the breast pocket.


Publishers have sued Google for breaching copyright. A settlement seems likely, but it may not be in the public’s interest.

The story of how Brin and Google’s other co-founder, Larry Page, met as graduate students in computer science at Stanford in the mid-nineties, and devised a series of elegant software algorithms that allowed Web searchers to find relevant information quickly and efficiently, has become part of Silicon Valley lore. Less well known is that, at the time, Brin and Page were also working on Stanford’s Digital Library Technologies Project, an attempt, funded by the federal government, to organize different kinds of stored information, including books, articles, and journals, in digital form. “There was an attitude in computer science that putting things on dead trees was obsolete and getting it all into a searchable, digital format was a quest that had to be accomplished someday,” Terry Winograd, a Stanford professor who was a mentor to Page and Brin, said.

After founding Google, in 1998, Page and Brin—who are now in their mid-thirties and worth around fourteen billion dollars each—began to talk about how to include books in the company’s database. Page, in particular, embraced the idea of putting books online; at one point, he set up a primitive lab in his office, with a scanner and a page-turning machine. “I think it was motivating to have those kinds of aspirations, but nobody really took it seriously,” Brin told me. The men were less interested in making it easy for people to obtain the full texts of books online than in making accessible the information those books contained. “We really care about the comprehensiveness of a search,” Brin said. “And comprehensiveness isn’t just about, you know, total number of words or bytes, or whatnot. But it’s about having the really high-quality information. You have thousands of years of human knowledge, and probably the highest-quality knowledge is captured in books. So not having that—it’s just too big an omission.” As Marissa Mayer put it, “Google has become known for 8; providing access to all of the world’s knowledge, and if we provide access to books we are going to get much higher-quality and much more reliable information. We are moving up the food chain.”

In 2002, Google quietly made overtures to several libraries at major universities. The company proposed to digitize the entire collection free of charge, and give the library an electronic copy of each of its books. “Larry is an undergrad alum here at Michigan, and he knew we were already interested in digitizing the library as part of our preservation efforts,” John Wilkin, an associate university librarian at Michigan, told me. “There was a lot of back-and-forth between Google and us in the process. We wanted to insure that the materials wouldn’t be damaged and that what came out could be used as a preservation surrogate. They started experimenting with different ways of copying the images, and we started a pilot project in July, 2004. We’ve been getting better, going faster. We’re doubling our output all the time.” The

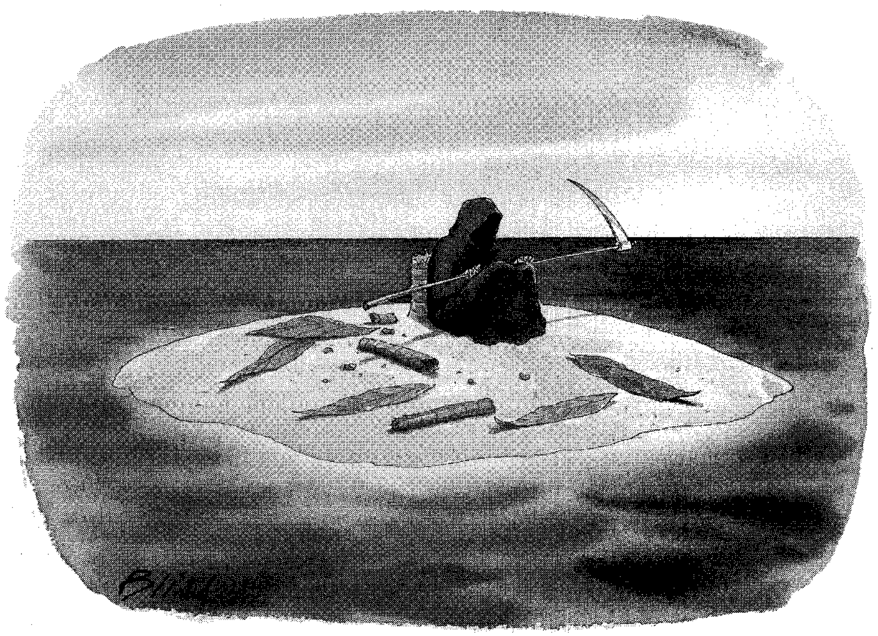
ARNOLD ROTH

Michigan library holds seven million volumes, and Wilkin believes that Google will have copied the entire collection in about six years.

Last month, at the New York Public Library, Google hosted a conference on the future of the publishing industry. About four hundred people—mainly publishing executives and agents—attended, most of them grimly aware of the simultaneous lethargy and panic that have characterized their industry's response to the digital age. Nearly all attempts to sell books in an electronic format have been disappointing, and now Google appeared to be encroaching on the publishers' domain. The implicit message of the conference was summed up by a quotation from Charles Darwin that was projected on a screen: "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change." As Laurence Kirschbaum, a longtime publishing executive who recently became a literary agent, told me at the conference, "Google is now the gatekeeper. They are reaching an audience that we as publishers and authors are not reaching. It makes perfect sense to use the specificity of a search engine as a tool for selling books."

Google thought so, too, and designed the books project accordingly. In addition to forming partnerships with libraries, the company has signed contracts with nearly every major American publisher. When one of these publishers' books is called up in response to search queries, Google displays a portion of the total work and shows links to the publisher's Web site and online shops like Amazon, where users can buy the book. "We are helping the publishers reach consumers that otherwise might not have known about their books and helping them market their books by giving limited but relevant previews of the books," Jim Gerber, Google's director of content partnerships, told me. "The Internet and search are custom made for marketing books. When there are a hundred and seventy-five thousand new books each year, you can't market each one of those books in mass market. When someone goes into a search engine to learn more about a topic, that is a perfect time to make them aware that a given book exists. Publishers know that 'browse leads to buy.' " (Google says that it does not take a cut of sales made through its books site.)

Still, on October 19, 2005, several leading publishers, including Simon & Schuster, the Penguin Group, and McGraw Hill—all of which are partners in Google Book Search—filed a lawsuit against the company, seeking to stop the project. The publishers don't object to Google's plan for helping them sell new books, but they assert that the library component of the project is illegal. They claim that Google's "massive, wholesale and systematic copying of entire books still protected by copyright" infringes on the publishers' rights. They demand that Google stop further copying and "destroy all unauthorized copies made by Google through the Google Library Project of any copyrighted works." (The Authors Guild filed its lawsuit around the same time.) The publishers, who have the support of the Association of American Publishers, are suffering from a version of the problem that John Kerry had in the last Presidential campaign: they are for Google Book Search at the same time that they are against it.



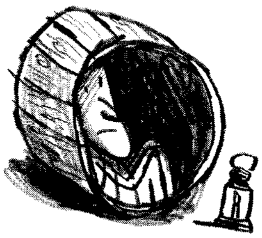
Copyright law dates to the birth of the Republic. Article I of the Constitution assigns Congress the right to pass laws "securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries." The first copyright law was passed in 1790, and it has been frequently and confusingly amended over the years, most recently in the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act of 1998, which extended copyright terms by twenty years. (The law is also known as the Mickey Mouse Protection Act, because the Walt Disney Company, seeking to protect its copyright on early animated classics like "Steamboat Willie," lobbied heavily for it.) The twisted history of copyright law has insured an awkward passage into the digital age.

The legal assertion at the core of Google's business plan is its purported right to scan millions of copyrighted books without payment to or permission from the copyright owners. Approximately twenty per cent of all books are in the public domain; these include books that were never copyrighted, like government publications, and works whose copyrights have expired, like "Moby-Dick." Google has simply copied such books and made them available on the Web. Roughly ten per cent of books are copyrighted and in print—that is, actively being sold by publishers. Many of these books are covered by Google's arrangement with its publisher partners, which allows the company to scan and display parts of the works.

The vast majority of books belong to a third category: still protected by copyright, or of uncertain status, and out of print. These books are at the center of the conflict between Google and the publishers. Google is scanning these books in full but making only "snippets" (the company's term) available on the Web. (Google searches turn up only the search term and about twenty words on either side of it.) Copyright law has never forbidden all "copying" of a protected work; scholars and journalists have long been allowed to quote portions of copyrighted material under the doctrine of fair use. Google maintains that the chunks of copyrighted material that it makes available on its books site are legal under fair use. "We really analogized book search to Web search, and we rely on fair use every day on Web search," David C. Drummond, a senior vice-president at Google who is overseeing the response to the lawsuits, told me. "Web sites that we crawl are copyrighted. People expect their Web sites to be found, and Google searches find them. So, by scanning books, we give books the chance to be found, too." (Google also has an "opt out" policy, which allows copyright holders to request that specific titles be omitted from the company's database.)

However, according to the plaintiffs in the cases against Google, the act of copying the complete text amounts to an infringement, even if only portions are made available to users. "What they are doing, of course, is scanning literally millions of copyrighted books without permission," Paul Aiken, the executive director of the Authors Guild, said. "Google is doing something that is likely to be very profitable for them, and they should pay for it. It's not enough to say that it will help the sales of some books. If you make a movie of a book, that may spur sales, but that doesn't mean you don't license the books. Google should pay. We should be finding ways to increase the value of the stuff on the Internet, but Google is saying the value of the right to put books up there is zero."

Google asserts that its use of the copyrighted books is "transformative," that its database turns a book into essentially a new product. "A key part of the line between what's fair use and what's not is transformation," Drummond said. "Yes, we're making a copy when we digitize. But surely the ability to find something because a term appears in a book is not the same thing as reading the book. That's why Google Books is a different product from the book itself." In other words, Google says that being able to search books on its site—which it describes as the equivalent of a giant library card catalogue—is not the same as making the books themselves available. But the publishers cite another factor in fair-use analysis: the amount of the copyrighted work that is used in the creation of the new one. Google is copying entire books, which doesn't sound "fair" to the plaintiff publishers and authors. "Traditional copyright analysis says that a transformation leads to the creation of a new and independent work, like a parody or a work of criticism," Jane Ginsburg, a professor at Columbia Law School, said. "Copying the entire work, which is what Google is doing, does not preclude a finding of fair use, but it does fall outside the traditional paradigm."



Harvard, Stanford, and Oxford have prohibited Google from scanning copyrighted works in their collections, limiting the company to books that are in the public domain. Because of the opacity of copyright law, and the extension of protections mandated by the 1998 act, it's not always clear which works are still protected. (Copyright status can become murky when authors die or publishing houses go out of business.) Stanford has drawn a line at 1964 and prohibited Google from copying most works published since that date. "When Google got sued, we got nervous," Michael A. Keller, the university librarian at Stanford, told me. "We're not a public institution. We don't have any state immunity from being sued ourselves, so we started sorting out the stuff that we know is public domain." (Several of the public institutions that are Google's partners, including the Universities of Michigan, California, Virginia, and Texas at Austin, are allowing the scanning of copyrighted material.)

The chief engineer of Google's system for scanning books in the library collections is Dan Clancy, who joined the company after eight years at NASA, where he supervised teams of Ph.D.s working on problems related to artificial intelligence. Google provides its employees with free food twenty-four hours a day, and Clancy, a tall, shambling man with a shock of white-blond hair, conducted most of our conversations with bits of granola bar clinging to his shirt.

"Previously, when people have done scanning, they always were constrained by their budget and their scale," Clancy told me. "They had to spend all this time figuring out which were the perfect ten thousand books, so they spent as much time in selection as in scanning. All the technology out there developed solutions for what I'll call low-rate scanning. There was no need for a company to build a machine that could scan thirty million books. Doing this project just using commercial, off-the-shelf technology was not feasible. So we had to build it ourselves."

Google will not discuss its proprietary scanning technology, but, rather than investing in page-turning equipment, the company employs people to operate the machines, I was told by someone familiar with the process. "Automatic page-turners are optimized for a normal book, but there is no such thing as a normal book," Clancy said. "There is a great deal of variability over books in a library, in terms of size or dust or brittle pages." (To needle Google, several blogs have posted images from the books site that include the scanners' fingers.) Google will not reveal how much it is spending on the books project. In 2005, Microsoft announced that it would spend two and a half million dollars to scan a hundred thousand out-of-copyright books in the collection of the British Library. At this rate, scanning thirty-two million books—the number in WorldCat's database—would cost Google eight hundred million dollars, a major but hardly extravagant expenditure for a multibillion-dollar corporation.

Copying all those pages presents many difficulties, but writing software to make the books useful to searchers is even harder. "The scanning technology is boring," Clancy said. "The real challenge is to get somebody something that they are actually interested in, inside a book. Web sites are part of a network, and that's a significant part of how we rank sites in our search—how much other sites refer to the others." But, he added, "Books are not part of a network. There is a huge research challenge, to understand the relationship between books."

Still, the basic search protocols function well. A search for "Heart of Darkness" leads immediately to Joseph Conrad's novel, which is not as obvious as it sounds, considering how common the words in the title are. As Clancy said, "If you put in 'Heart of Darkness,' we have to know that you're looking for the novel, not a book about lighting conditions in cardiac surgery. So how do we do that? We rank some words more important than others. The title may matter more than the content, so we may weight that more. You could also look at what other people have searched for, so if everyone who searched for 'Heart of Darkness' clicked on the novel, we might figure that you probably will, too."

The most important data for ranking searches, Clancy explained, may come from Web pages that link to books in Google's database. (For instance, if links on the phrase "Clinton's autobiography" direct users to a copy of "My Life" on the books site, there is a high probability that people who use the same search terms will also want this result.) "We just started, and we need to make these books networked, and we need people to help us do that," Clancy said.

Google's database contains many books in languages other than English, but for now they must be searched in the original tongue. On the company's Web site, there is already a primitive translation feature, and it may someday be enhanced to allow books to be rendered in another language at the touch of a button. "In terms of democratization, you want to be able to access information," Clancy told me. In places like the Arab world, where few titles are translated into the local languages each year, he said, access to the world's books could have a substantial impact. "We are talking about a universal digital library," Clancy went on. "I hope this world evolves so that there exists a time where somebody sitting at a terminal can access all the world's information."

Such messianism cannot obscure the central truth about Google Book Search: it is a business. Google has pledged not to show advertising next to the pages of library books, but the company does sell advertising alongside search results that lead to books obtained from publishers. Google's prospects for producing revenue from the books project appear rather modest, but the company has often made a profit on ventures that initially seemed unlikely to be lucrative. "We've had this fortunate streak that when we've done things that have impacted our users and society as a whole—positively, in a significant way—we've been rewarded by that downstream in some way, even though we may not have envisioned exactly what it was right offhand," Sergey Brin told me. "We didn't have ads when we first put up Web search. It wasn't clear it was great business when we started search. In fact, the companies that were doing search were moving away from it. But we just thought it was important, and we thought that where there was a will there would be a way. And in fact it turned out to be a great way to make money—doing search with targeted advertising. And I think you'll find the same sort of thing here."

The key legal question is whether the courts will allow Google to continue to scan copyrighted material without permission. But the schedule of the lawsuits may turn out to be as significant as the merits of the cases, which are before Judge John E. Sprizzo. In keeping with the stately pace of federal litigation, the depositions of witnesses are to begin sometime this year, and the parties will be allowed to file motions for summary judgment—in Google's case, to dismiss the suits—in early 2008. Then there could be a trial. If the cases are appealed, they could linger well into the next decade.

However, most people involved in the dispute believe that a settlement is likely. "The suits that have been filed are a business negotiation that happens to be going on in the courts," Marissa Mayer told me. "We think of it as a business negotiation that has a large legal-system component to it." According to Pat Schroeder, the former congresswoman, who is the president of the Association of American Publishers, "This is basically a business deal. Let's find a way to work this out. It can be done. Google can license these rights, go to the rights holder of these books, and make a deal."

The terms of such a deal aren't hard to imagine. The Authors Guild is concerned that pirated copies of the books on Google's site could leak to the public, and so the organization would insist on security measures. (Sadly, for writers and publishers, demand for their products has never been robust enough to generate a major piracy problem.) As for distribution of the proceeds from the site, Google might agree to share revenue with publishers, in the way that radio stations pay for the music they play; publishers could receive a fee based on a statistical analysis of how often their books are viewed. Google could pay in cash or in kind, with advertising.

But a settlement that serves the parties' interests does not necessarily benefit the public. "It's clearly in both sides' interest to settle," Lawrence Lessig, a professor at Stanford Law School, said. "Businesses in Internet time can't wait around for years for lawsuits to be resolved. Google wants to be able to get this done, and get permission to resume scanning copyrighted material at all the libraries. For the publishers, if Google gives them anything at all, it creates a practical precedent, if not a legal precedent, that no one has the right to scan this material without their consent. That's a win for them. The problem is that even though a settlement would be good for Google and good for the publishers, it would be bad for everyone else."

Libraries have recognized for some time that they must adapt to the digital age, and many have taken steps in that direction. In 1995, Stanford founded the HighWire Press, which now provides electronic access to more than a thousand scholarly journals. A few years later, Stanford digitized most of its card catalogue, and circulation of its books increased by fifty per cent. "Once our students could sit in their dorm rooms and find out what we had in the library, they sought out more books," Michael Keller, the university librarian, says. Individual libraries sometimes received grants to scan specific collections—in 2001, the New York Public Library used federal money to digitize a substantial portion of the collection at its Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture—but a comprehensive effort seemed inconceivable. According to Paul LeClerc, who has

"Sir, can I see your head shot and registration?"

• •

been the president of the New York Public Library for the past thirteen years, "For the first decade of my tenure, I was always asked, 'Weren't libraries going to go online?' And I'd say of course we want to do it, but it's not going to happen, because no one is going to give us the money to do it. Nowhere on the horizon was that amount of money predictable or identifiable. Then came Google. This struck us as being the quickest, the fastest, and the most efficient way of getting large-scale additions to our collections online for free use."

Among Google's potential competitors in the field of library digitization are members of the Open Content Alliance, which facilitates various scanning projects around the country and overseas. Funded largely by Microsoft and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the O.C.A. has formed alliances with many companies and institutions, including the Boston Public Library, the American Museum of Natural History, and Johns Hopkins University. For the moment, though, the O.C.A.'s members are copying only material in the public domain (and works from copyright owners who have given explicit permission), which limits the scope of the projects substantially.

Google's advantage may well be cemented if the company settles its lawsuits with the publishers and authors. "If Google says to the publishers, 'We'll pay,' that means that everyone else who wants to get into this business will have to say, 'We'll pay,' " Lessig said. "The publishers will get more than the law entitles them to, because Google needs to get this case behind it. And the settlement will create a huge barrier for any new entrants in this field."

In other words, a settlement could insulate Google from competitors, which would be especially troubling, because the company has already proved that when it comes to searches it is not infallible. "Google didn't get video search right—YouTube did," Tim Wu, a professor at Columbia Law School, said. (Google solved that problem by buying YouTube last year for $1.6 billion.) "Google didn't get blog search right—technorati.com did," Wu went on. "So maybe Google won't get book search right. But if they settle the case with the publishers and create huge barriers to newcomers in the market there won't be any competition. That's the greatest danger here."

The most striking thing about Pajama Day at Google was how few people participated. Most of the rank and file saw the stunt for the manufactured fun that it was. They came to work in their usual slacker uniforms of jeans and T-shirts—which are, in their way, as conformist as white shirts and ties were at I.B.M. in the nineteen-sixties. Google, as its employees seem to recognize, cannot pretend to be anything other than a large and powerful corporation.

It's easy to mock Google's unofficial motto—"Don't be evil"—but there is nothing evil about Google Book Search. At the same time, there is nothing inherently virtuous about it. Google has succeeded because, on the whole, it has developed excellent products; it's folly to judge the company's behavior on moral grounds. Its shareholders certainly don't.

Nor can publishers and authors, who are struggling for a way to survive in a new age, portray their conflict with the company as one between good and evil. The dual status of several leading publishers as both partner and adversary to Google underscores their desperate need to hedge their bets in a digital world that they have yet to master. The publishers' complaint against Google states that "the Publishers support making books available in digital form so that those books can be, among other things, researched through electronic means." That may be true in theory, but trade publishers, in particular, have been slow to embrace new technology, especially for out-of-print books; Google will almost certainly bring more attention to these works than their own publishers have.

The law is supposed to resolve issues like these—between self-interested parties with reasonable claims and legitimate arguments. But the rules of copyright are so ambiguous, and the courts so slow, that the judicial system serves largely to implement the law of the jungle. "There is a real opportunity to move books into the digital arena," Marissa Mayer told publishers during the conference at the New York Public Library. "And we are going to do it together." ♦

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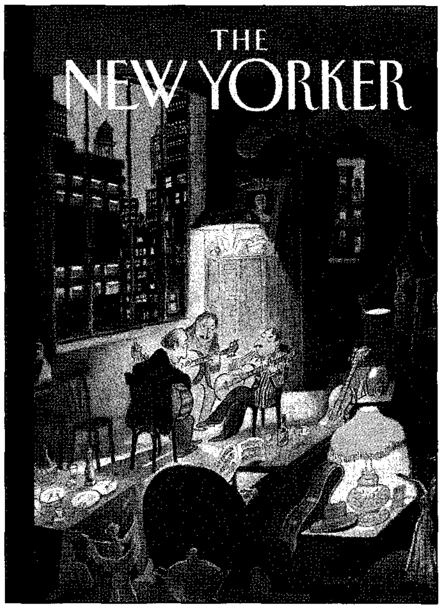

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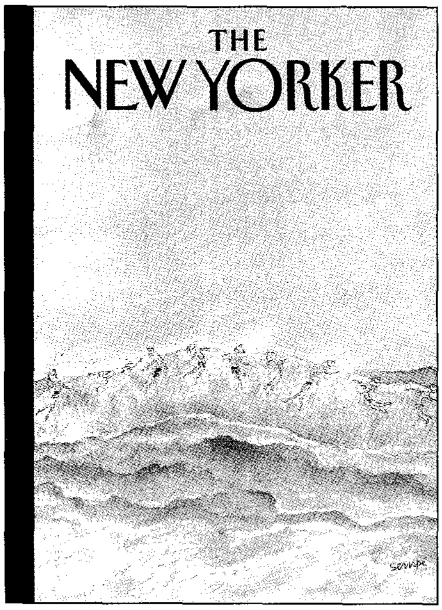

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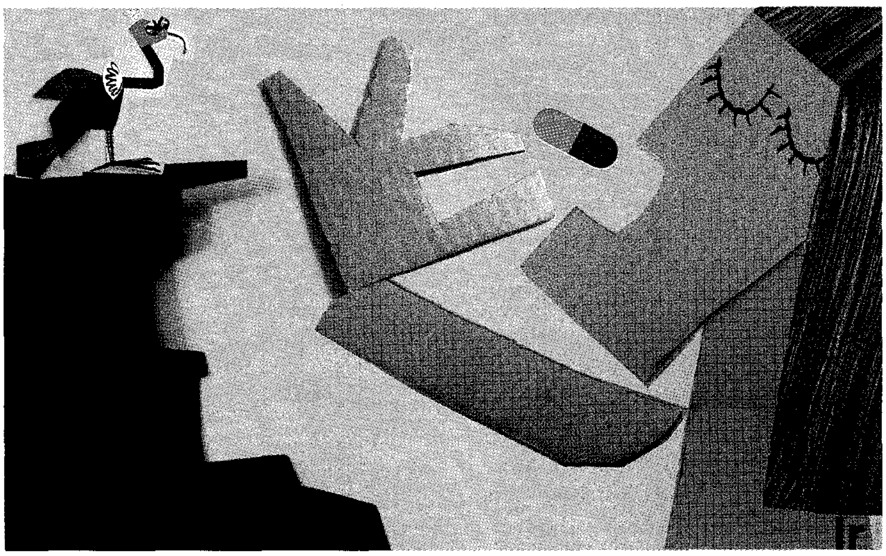

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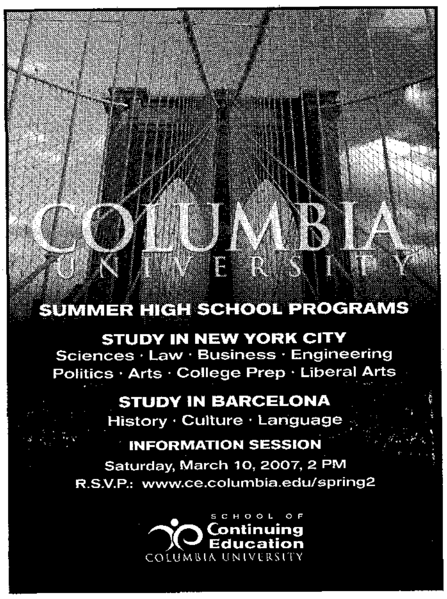
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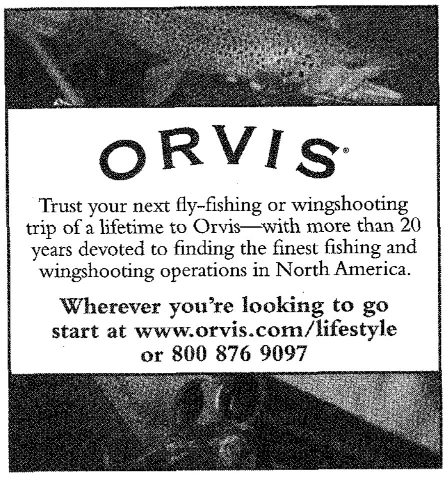
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BOOMTOWN BLUES

How natural gas changed the way of life in Sublette County.

BY ALEXANDRA FULLER

The annual Rendezvous Rodeo, held over the second weekend in July, is the largest of the season in Sublette County, Wyoming. Behind the chutes, cowboys were preparing to ride, wrapping old injuries, taping newer ones, stretching their backs, arms, and legs. Redneck scents prevailed: weak beer, dust, manure, diesel, horse sweat, tobacco. The talk was pre-battle jittery and punctuated with barks of laughter. Older cowboys looked on, all of them crooked in the lower back, as if everything south of the rib cage had calcified. Cowgirls waited for the barrel-racing and roping, clutching babies or horses or both, and sporting tight jeans and wind-fire-and-flood-proof hair. A small girl in a cowboy hat galloped into the arena carrying a Stars and Stripes that was larger than the body of her pony. In a high, clear voice, she belted out the national anthem, and everyone who had a hat used it to cover his or her heart.

Then the real business of the rodeo began. I took a seat in the bleachers with the rest of the crowd, most of them family and friends of the participants. The first cowboy up was thrown down hard about three bucks into a very quick ride. Even from across the arena, you could hear the air leave his lungs, the insult of flesh connecting with the earth. The animal continued to buck, spitting sand up against the rails, until the strap around its belly was released by a pickup man, then it flattened its neck and spun around the arena a couple of times until it found the gate.

Since the unhorsed cowboy didn't look as though he'd be getting up anytime soon, the couple behind me began necking, and the commentator started up with a stash of "my wife" jokes. An ambulance edged between the rows of jeans and plaid shirts that lined the fence, but the commentator sent it back. "I don't think we need the meat wagon," he said. "He's still alive—I saw his toe twitch."

More of nothing happened. The sun was setting. A fire pumped smoke out of the Wind River Mountains, and a brownish bath-rim stain crossed the horizon, a result of natural-gas drilling activity on the high plains. "Look at that, folks," the commentator said, by way of diversion. "A real Wyoming sunset!" At last the cowboy stirred, sat up, was helped to his feet, and hobbled out, waving. A second later, the next chute opened, and a fresh horse broke into the arena, its body already arched in a mean cat jump.

By the time the team ropers were set to ride, midsummer night had descended and the arena was flooded with electric light. Roping is an exquisite art form, but the crowds had already trickled out, and the ropers performed for only a handful of die-hard spectators. Saul Bencomo was on the fourteenth team to ride. A steer bolted into the arena, and Bencomo and his horse spilled after it, his rope moving like a wave of silver water above his head. After twelve beats of the horse's hooves, the loop flowed around the steer's neck. With a quick flick, the loose end of the lariat was around the saddle horn, and Bencomo's horse sat on its haunches. The steer jerked up short, and the picture stalled in a cloud of dust. Next to me, Bencomo's wife, Holly Davis, smiled. "He got it," she said.

Davis is a third-generation cowgirl. Bencomo is a Mexican-Italian vaquero from California. The two work for local ranchers, "letting cows out in the spring, moving them all summer, digging them out of the willows in the fall, irrigating, cutting hay, vetting animals, fixing fences—working like a dog to stay one step ahead of the next surprise," as Davis puts it. In between ranch duties, she works as a brand inspector, Bencomo brings in a little prize money from the local rodeos, and both train horses.

"It's not glamorous," Davis told me. "It's a hard life. You've got to love it. If you don't, there's so much more opportunity in the oil patch or wherever else." (This part of Wyoming is experiencing a boom in natural-gas exploitation, but locals still refer to the various drilling fields, which spread across the country in patchwork style, as "the oil patch.") Davis is "one of the greatest cowgirls this county has ever produced," one resident told me. She is legendary in the area for her toughness; there's a photograph of her in the rest room of the museum in Big Piney ("Ice Box of the Nation," population 455). When she told me the story of how she ended up where she is (not far from her parents' ranch, where she still works), and of how, by contrast, most of the relatives and friends she had as a girl have all ended up where they are (out on the oil patch, out of state, or in Rawlins State Penitentiary), she did so almost in one matter-of-fact breath. In the end, the important difference between Holly and those who gave up ranching for town life or prison life is that most people lack the patience for her line of work. It takes a special passion for solitude and a special tolerance for slowness to survive here. "Two, three hours, you're going to move five miles," Davis said of a cattle drive. "You can't be out here for long if you don't know how to be still."

It was past eleven by the time I left the rodeo grounds, with a few ropers still to ride—midnight cowboys who would have to get home and feed their horses before rising again at dawn. Behind me, the Wind River range sheared blackly against a moonlit sky and, out in front, the high plains swelled like a great, dark sea. Anchored to the shadowy expanse were half a dozen illuminated drilling rigs that resembled so many Eiffel Towers.

Sublette County insists on its identity as a ranching community. Pinedale, the county seat, boasts the Cowboy Bar, the Corral Bar and Grill, and Stockman's Restaurant and Lounge. A historical information board, which stands just outside the asphalt oasis in the desert that is the town of Big Piney, is headlined "Historic Sublette County of Cattle and Men," and lists the five original settlers of nearby Piney Creek, in 1878-79. For reasons that are very important (if you are familiar with the difference between raising a high-country cow and one bred for southern Texas), the historical board also includes the cryptic sentence "Their cattle were not Longhorns." But the truth is that if the graph showing the growth of ranching jobs in Sublette County during the past few years were your heart rate, you'd be dead. On the other hand, a graph showing the growth of oil-patch jobs almost does a backflip, it veers upward so steeply. Even steeper is the graph showing recent increases in crime and drug use in the community.

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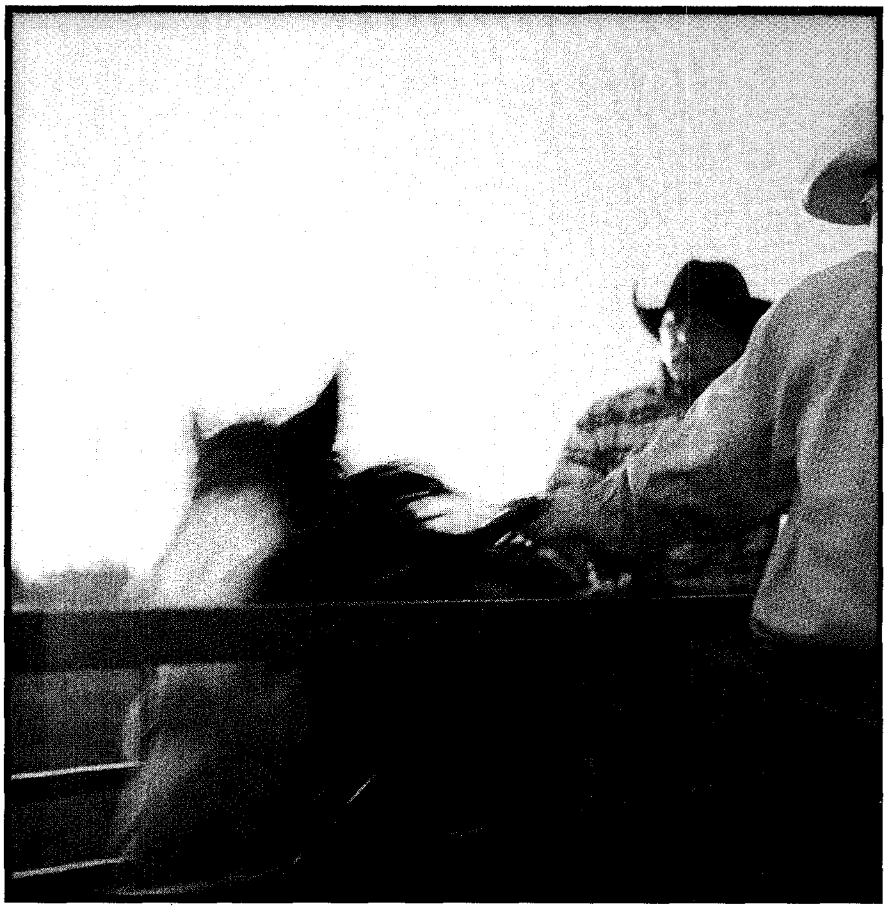

The influx of drilling money has made traditional ranching a less attractive calling.

For the first hundred years of its history, Sublette's freeze-drying winters and long cyclical droughts sent many babies to their graves (accounting for those heartbreaking dates on the scoured markers in the little desert cemetery overlooking the Green River Valley); it was a tough place to settle. Partly because of that, much of the land was incidentally conserved, providing a home for a hundred thousand big-game animals, the largest mule-deer population in the country, the longest big-game migration in the lower forty-eights (the pronghorn antelope that summer in Grand Teton National Park make their way back to the desert every winter), and some of the largest tracts of wild lands left in the United States.

Oil and gas booms have been a part of Sublette history—most notably in the nineteen-fifties and again in the eighties (rumor has it that a sign on the outskirts of Pinedale at the end of that boom read, "Last one to leave turn out the light"), but nothing had quite prepared the county for the current state of affairs. Six or seven years ago, various developments opened Sublette up to a new explosion of mineral extraction. First, a technological advancement in hydraulic fracturing—or "fracing," pronounced "frakking"—allowed natural gas to be extracted from very tight rock. (Tiny particles of sand suspended in a gel are blasted into the rock under extreme pressure, holding it open long enough to allow the gas to escape—a process that shakes the windows of houses as much as a mile away.) Then an administration friendly to oil and gas extraction came into power. Higher energy prices and the subsequent war in Iraq made domestic sources of energy more attractive, and, eventually, Hurricane Katrina closed down many of the gas wells in the Gulf. All these factors led to what one rancher called "an unmitigated frenzy." In the ninety years from 1910 to 1999, just over three thousand wells were drilled in Sublette County. Since 2000, almost eighteen hundred new wells have been added, and seven thousand more have been approved for drilling in the next ten years. Energy companies are pushing for—and will likely get—an energy corridor that would allow them unfettered access to private and public lands in the area, for pipelines and related developments.

In 1916, Congress passed the Stock Raising Homestead Act, which allowed settlers in the Western states to claim a parcel of up to six hundred and forty acres of land—a significant increase over the initial allocation of a hundred and sixty acres—since the arid conditions there were making it impossible for ranchers to survive. The federal government, however, retained mineral rights to the land. According to the Bureau of Land Management, about forty-three per cent of the private land in the state today is federal split estate, meaning that the rancher owns the surface rights but the subsurface mineral rights belong to the government, which may, in turn, lease them to energy companies. Wyoming is one of twelve states to allow companies to take over private land in this way. The state's leaders are almost all pro-energy development. Barbara Cubin, the Republican congresswoman for Wyoming, issued a statement last year arguing that the causes of global warming were still open to debate. In June, she co-sponsored the Deep Ocean Energy Resources Act, a carefully hidden provision of which would oblige federal land-management agencies to act on drilling permits within ten days, or pay a fine to the energy companies for the delay, regardless of the circumstances.

But, even on the lands that are being hurt the most, opposition to the monoculture of the mineral industry is muted. The truth is that no one can turn down the oil companies; the payoff is simply too high. In 2004, oil and gas companies in Wyoming made twelve billion dollars and returned $1.7 billion to the region in the form of royalty payments, a massive injection of cash in a state that has a population of roughly half a million. The revenue from drilling justifies, among other things, the lack of state income tax and tax on food, as well as generous scholarships to the University of Wyoming and local community colleges. Wyoming is a "carbontocracy," indebted to minerals for its promise of an easy life, yet strangely impoverished by its own wealth, in much the same way that developing countries can become trapped by the complicated gift of foreign aid.

There is a name for the depression and lawlessness that come with the dubious blessing of mineral wealth: Gillette syndrome. The psychologist ElDean Kohrs coined the term in 1973, popularizing it, a year later, in a paper titled "Social Consequences of Boom Growth in Wyoming," in which he described the ills then being visited upon the coal town of Gillette, Wyoming. A boomtown, he explained, experiences an increase in crime, drug use, violence, and cost of living, and a decrease in just about everything good, except money. (And if it weren't for the new courthouse and the fifty-bed jail in Pinedale, the seventeen-million-dollar aquatic center under construction, and the new hundred-room extended-stay hotel, which has been leased to Halliburton for the next five years, if it weren't for the grand new roads, built to accommodate oil trucks, or the hundreds of 2006 S.U.V.s on those roads, you'd never know that Sublette County was filthy rich.)

CORPORATE
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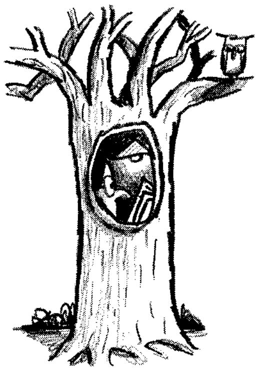
A recent report approved by Ralph Boynton, the Sublette County Attorney, begins, "Reported crimes and arrests have been increasing at an exponential rate since the year 2000 and have been shown to be highly statistically correlated with gas and oil-field activity within Sublette County." The study shows the crime rate rising by thirty per cent from 2004 to 2005, a period when drilling activity increased by fifteen per cent. Air quality and the quality of life in the area have also been affected. Drilling has recently increased in the Wyoming Range and the surrounding foothills, and the steady flow of air traffic (helicopter relays to transport equipment to remote areas), the use of explosives for seismic work, and the constant rumble of trucks carrying helmet-clad men across the desert all reinforce the sense that this boom is, in part, war-related.

With the arrival, since 2000, of nearly three thousand roughnecks (about half of whom are here at any given time), off-rig boredom has begun to hang like a stalled weather system over the county, and boredom explains at least some of the recent upturn in poaching, as well as the startling number of bullet-pocked road signs, the three or four bar brawls every week, and the twenty-odd pickup trucks on the edge of town spinning doughnuts on gravel roads, clouds of dust stained pink in their taillights. "The violence right now is like nothing I've ever seen in this community before," one night-shift nurse practitioner told me. And in a community this small—Sublette County has a population of around seven thousand, in less than a dozen tiny towns spread out over almost five thousand square miles—even random violence has a personal feel to it. Last spring, a woman was kicked so badly by her friend's husband that she was left with permanently impaired vision and severe facial disfigurement. The perpetrator wrote a letter of apology from jail and posted it in the weekly newspaper, the *Pinedale Roundup*. "I know that it will be quite a while until things will be halfway normal for you again and I'll pray for your eyesight to return to 100%," his letter said, in part.

Fuelling the atmosphere of restlessness is the growing use of methamphetamine (primarily d-methamphetamine hydrochloride, or crystal meth)—a highly addictive psychostimulant, which is the roughneck's drug of choice for two good reasons. "It's available and it's cheap," Levi Licking, a thirty-year-old Sublette native and gas-field worker, told me. "Why would you want to spend a hundred bucks on coke and have it last a few hours when the same value of meth will last you two, three days?" And if you run out, I was told, you can always find someone to make more, with a recipe from the Web and ingredients from under the sink. There is no doubt that methamphetamine had made it into the community before the current boom, but the injection of a large testosterone-heavy workforce, assigned to tough and repetitive work, and the lack of anything else to do in the area have made a small-town problem a big deal. The actual number of people arrested for methamphetamine use in the county is underwhelming—nine in 2004 and forty-three in 2005—unless you keep in mind that the entire population could fit comfortably into a couple of large cruise ships. (In neighboring Teton County, which has almost three times the population of Sublette but no mineral development, the chief of police of Jackson, Dan Zivkovich, told me that methamphetamine incidents are still so sporadic that they don't warrant special notice. "Meth is just not the drug of choice up here," he said.) Detective Sergeant K. C. Lehr, the team commander for the newly appointed Sublette County Drug Task Force, told me last July that he confiscated fifty-eight grams of meth in 2005. "We've already seized over two pounds that's come through Sublette this year," he said. "We're not even touching the surface. There's so much meth coming through this community, it would blow our minds." Jeff Swain, the coördinator of a local mental-health and substance-abuse center, said that the gas boom had increased his workload—which is, to a large extent, made up of court-ordered drug- and alcohol-related clients—to the point where he felt as if he were running a triage unit. "We are, on an ongoing basis, unable to meet the demands of the services requested of us," he said. Intensifying the problem, Swain added, was the schedule of shifts on the patch. Roughnecks are often required to remain unnaturally alert for twelve hours at a time, two weeks in a row, away from friends and family (about seventy-five per cent of the gas-field workers are from outside the region)—a state of affairs that has led people who might not ordinarily be tempted to try meth to use it simply to stay awake. Although drug tests out on the patch are becoming both more rigorous and more frequent, there are almost always ways to get around them. There are stories of people taping clean urine to their legs in condoms, passing urine to each other through truck windows, heating it up in the microwave, or even having one guy provide all the urine for his rig. "To have heard of parents who collect urine from their kids under false pretences (suggesting that it's for the child's medical well-being) so that they can pass their tests is very disturbing to me, but not surprising," Swain said.



Levi Licking and his wife, Becca, live with their two daughters in a pinkish-brown split-level a few miles west of Pinedale and only a few feet from Trappers Point—a historic marker indicating the half-mile-wide migration corridor between the Green and the New Fork Rivers, through which several thousand pronghorn antelope and mule deer pass twice every year, on their way to and from their critical winter grazing land out on the high plains. This stretch of land also serves as a collecting point for the biannual cattle drives that bring the livestock in off the mountains in the fall and set them out again in the spring. The Lickings share their house with a pit bull terrier, a Chihuahua, an enormously fat cat, and a rescued Burmese python. Two roughnecks—old friends who work with Licking on the oil patch—rent space in the basement. (Although the boom has brought jobs to the county, it has also made housing scarce and expensive—at least a thousand dollars a month for a trailer. Two five-hundred-unit subdivisions are being planned for the edge of town, to absorb further growth as well as to alleviate the current housing shortage.)

The house is furnished for people whose most important reference point is the land: rugged carpet, a couple of bottomed-out sofas, a utilitarian coffee table, and a woodstove (which was blazing on the day that I visited, in early fall—Sublette County regularly registers some of the lowest temperatures in the forty-eight states). On the wall above the python's cage was a framed pencil drawing of Licking at eighteen, in his heyday as a bareback rider. Next to that were several professional photographs of bucking horses ridden by him as a young man, his spurs digging into the horses' flanks, his face hidden behind his cowboy hat, his hand in the air as if in a black-power salute. On an adjacent wall was a framed newspaper article about a local rodeo, featuring Licking's father with his own cowboy hat tugged down over a weathered, inscrutable face.

"I was pretty much scared of horses, growing up," Licking told me. But when he was twelve or thirteen his father put him on his first full-size bucking horse at the Pinedale rodeo. "I learned to rodeo by being in the rodeo," Licking said. "I could get on a bale of hay and practice spurring it, but other than that I learned to ride right there in front of the crowd. The first time the chute opened, I couldn't hear nothing, I couldn't see nothing. I remember wondering when I was gonna hit the ground, then I hit the ground, and I knew because it hurt like hell." Licking paused now and grasped his wrist, where the bucking strap would have been wrapped. "I was totally hooked."

By the time he was a senior, in 1995, Licking was seventh in the nation in high-school rodeo and one year into a meth habit that would last a decade. "When I first did meth, I did it for a week straight," he told me. "I was up for at least five, six days. I came down, I went to sleep for the night, I woke up, and I didn't have the nervous shakes, the jitters. So I thought, You know, they all lied to me—addiction is a bunch of bullshit. I didn't feel addicted; I just felt like I wanted some more meth." But one evening, that summer of his senior year, Licking was strapping on his spurs at a rodeo in the town of Jackson when the ground curled up and hit him so fast that he didn't see it coming. He had been awake for a week straight, snorting meth as often as he felt himself coming down, but his body had finally shorted. He picked himself up, got on his ride, and won the rodeo. Even so, he realized that he had to give up either horses or meth. It was Licking's last rodeo.

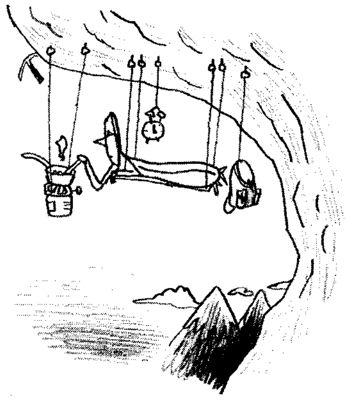
By the time the cops caught up with him, two years ago (Licking had stolen two motorcycles, which he was planning to trade for meth in the city of Rock Springs), ten years of drug use had eaten at his frame. "He looked like just a white-grayish sheet of skin draped over a skeleton—he was horrible," Becca said. Licking agreed. "It's most definitely hard on your body. But it affects different people in different ways. The worst symptoms are the things they can't show you on a poster. I am a strong believer in you go to work, you don't beat on your family, you come home every night. And, you know, I lost those values when I was really, really messed up on meth. I lost all my self-respect—I didn't give a shit what anybody thought about me."

In a way, the oil boom saved Licking. It gave him a job near home and the stabilizing influence of Becca, whom he married at twenty-one, and who is all pre-Raphaelite curves and has an unflappable maternal way about her that enables her to keep her husband and his roughneck friends in line. In practice, this means muddy boots off at the carpet; cussing to the edges of the conversation; smoking to the edges of the room; drinking within reason; and no meth in the house. "No way, no how," she said. "I've been in that hell with Levi. Been there, done that. No more."

For his part, Licking was grateful to be alive, he told me, and for the work, even though the hours are long and the conditions brutal. "You've got the people who don't like the oil field but like the money," he told me. (A roughneck can make as much as sixty thousand dollars a year, a substantial step up from the minimum wage and a kick in the teeth that a cowboy can expect.) "But I think they forget what it was like before the oil field. I grew up with my dad gone all the time, because there was no work here and he was out of town." He cracked his knuckles, and his voice dropped. "You leave a kid out here to figure it out for himself, and he's got a lot of room to mess up, and that's gonna include addiction to meth. The old local crowd that I ran with are pretty much done. They're either in prison or went somewhere else." Licking counts himself as one of three out of twenty of his friends who made it off meth.

He said that the real problem with meth use on the rig is the potential for accidents provoked by meth users operating recklessly. "A couple of weeks ago, I showed up on a rig and I got out of my truck and looked at the roughnecks that were there and they were fucked up—I mean big time, just going jammin', crammin'," he said. "I walked over, got in my truck, called my supervisor, and I told him, 'Look, I don't think it's safe to work here.' The old boy thought he could run the situation and keep everybody safe, and the forklift operator dropped a pipe on the guy's foot and broke it and whatnot—yet the guy that got his foot dropped on had three grams of meth in his pocket, so he got in trouble and went to jail."

One of the basement roughnecks—a handsome man, with a shaved head, a sunburned neck, and intense blue eyes, nicknamed the Kid—came and sat with us while we talked. He wore jeans and a T-shirt over long underwear; the edge of a tattoo was visible on the back of his neck—a mixture of small-town rebel and old-fashioned cowboy manners. The Kid's family is from Sublette, and when he first left school he found work breaking colts on a ranch up North. "Sixty bucks a head, I could turn out five colts a week," he said. "I thought I was gonna die out there and no one was gonna know or care. I took a job on the rigs as soon as I could. At least they pay you for risking your life. I'll work this boom the rest of my life," he predicted.



Licking and the Kid both told me that there is no real incentive for the bosses on the rigs to clean up the drug use. "If they did, they'd have no one left working," the Kid said, and, anyway, he added, meth just comes with the roughneck culture, so why panic now? "Meth has been part of my life since I was a child. All my life I've had to deal with it, whether it be roughnecks, my family, or my friends. I've watched people like Levi do stupid shit, and I've done my share of stupid stuff." The Kid went on, "We're big people—we don't need cops to babysit us." He looked at me as if I had the answer. Then he came up with a solution for himself: "The only way you're gonna stop the meth addiction here is they've got to introduce something else. In order to get a little, they gotta give a little. It's kinda hard to convince the roughnecks—someone that makes a bunch a money, that's gonna be away from his family and his wife for a week at a time, that's with another bunch of bored roughnecks—it's hard to convince them not to want to have fun. The only way I can see for putting a dent in the meth is something like a titty bar—you know, like a Hooters. What else do you see working?"

On the Jonah field—a natural-gas field south of Pinedale—the Canada-based company EnCana has the majority of leases, approximately five hundred wells over about twenty-three thousand acres. (The Bureau of Land Management has just approved the drilling of an additional thirty-one hundred wells in this area alone.) The high plains have a way of diminishing and distorting the scale of everything, and, until you're climbing the stairs to the doghouse on a drilling rig in the Jonah field, it's difficult to imagine the height of the rig or the sense of exposure out here; it's as if the tower were anchored to a swell of water that might shift at any moment and set you adrift. On the day that I visited, a stiff, hot breeze rising up off the ground caught the rig's flag in a whiplash, and EnCana's spokesman, Paul Ulrich, and I had to raise our voices to be heard. When we opened

"How would you feel if I woke you up every morning wanting sex?"

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the door to the doghouse (where the operations for the rig—computers, telephone, and coffeemaker—were sheltered), the most overwhelming sound was that of the drill bit barking as it wound its way deep into the earth. Four young men, uniformed and serious, manned the rig. The atmosphere was one of grim efficiency. Notices warned that drug and alcohol use would not be tolerated. The only hint of any lightheartedness was a seemingly official sign that quipped, "Sexual harassment will not be tolerated. But it will be 'graded.'"

A similarly serious atmosphere prevailed at the EnCana "man camps"—employee dormitories—which were laid out in a sterile section of land on the other side of the highway. The beds had clean sheets; the garbage cans were emptied; everything was designed to be temporary, anonymous, and easily wiped down with a mop. In the main section of the camp, a cafeteria offered sandwiches, brownies, cookies, juice, and milk. A huge television screen dominated a game room. There was nothing to suggest drugs or alcohol. There was hardly even anything to suggest men.

Ulrich, who served in the Navy during the first Iraq war, was square-jawed and handsome, with a serviceman's sense of discipline and an old warrior's outlook on life. "Eight hundred people work here on behalf of EnCana," he said. "And anyone working for us—anyone at all—they're subject to our drug policies. These young individuals are out there doing dangerous work in all weathers, twenty-four hours a day—it's just blistering in the summer, and forty degrees below with a wind chill you wouldn't believe in the winter. We owe them a drug-free environment. If we have an incident, everyone is tested for drugs and alcohol on the spot. If there's paraphernalia, we lock down the rig and test everyone on sight. There's no drugs and alcohol allowed in the man camps, either. Lights out at ten o'clock."

Still, Ralph Boynton, the county attorney—a man whose booming, confident delivery suggests that he is used to addressing a jury that isn't allowed to answer back—says that although the energy companies may be trying to coöperate with law enforcement the oil patch is fuelling crime and the use of meth in the community. "Pounds of methamphetamine are coming into the oil patch every week," he said. "And, you know, people are crafty and they're cagey, and if they see an employer they're gonna hightail it, get rid of the stuff. But people say you can get methamphetamine anywhere you want on the oil patch, and drug interdiction becomes difficult, because there's a loyalty among the drug users. On two occasions, I've heard that there was a drug check to be performed the next morning—word was leaked, and all of a sudden everything was squeaky clean."

"If you fail a piss test, you're not going to work out on the Jonah field," I was told by a local ex-dealer, who had been caught manufacturing meth. "But there are other rigs that'll hire you. I know three or four drillers, and everyone on their crew is high, but they get shit done and they don't care. If it gets out that the cops are going to show up, they shut the rig down and say, 'Everyone go home.' That way, they don't have to take a piss test and fire everyone, and they can all go back to work the next week."

While the social problems of the boom are being, by turns, policed or ignored, the environmental consequences of the drilling are taking effect with such speed that even the watchdog groups have a hard time keeping track. The high desert of Sublette County has an unforgiving geological memory. The inland sea of fifty million years ago is suggested by pink-and-white layered dunes. Old-growth sagebrush and pronghorn antelope have evolved over thousands of years to live with thin moisture and cremating winds. The flinty soil that accounts for those tinny hoofbeats in old Westerns crumbles under the weight of anything heavier than a soft-footed coyote. Such landscape is easily scarred—you can still see the wagon ruts from the Oregon Trail—which makes the hasty real-estate developments and fifth-wheel-trailer parks that have spread in latter years stand out with more than ordinary ugliness.

Solid proof of environmental degradation takes time to accumulate (officially, oil-company spokespeople speak of "changes" rather than of "degradation," and point to the pronghorn grazing on reclaimed land next to the rigs as anecdotal evidence that their environmental policies are adequate), but almost everyone, including many in the industry, will tell you, off the record, that the environmental damage is likely to be irreversible. "Make the wrong mark and you'll be looking at your mistake for a long, long time," Holly Davis told me in mid-September, when I joined her and Saul Bencomo on a cattle drive for a rancher named Freddie Botur. "Your grandkids and great-grandkids will be looking at your mistake. You'll be remembered for the mess you left."

What has been indisputably upset by the boom is the careful balance of ranching, drilling, and tourism that the community had maintained for almost a hundred years. Winter had traditionally brought a kind of sacred silence to the region, as the tourists went home, the rigs shut down, and the ranchers tucked in for the duration. Now drilling continues year-round, day and night, even on lands that Wyoming Game and Fish has set aside as critical winter habitats. Until recently, the people who lived here had to pay attention to the land and to the weather, to the cycle of the seasons and to their neighbors, in order to survive. There was a sort of forced meditation as a rancher waited for his hay to ripen, or dealt with the round-the-clock task of keeping calves alive in an April blizzard. Now minerals are being extracted at such a rate that there is no time or tolerance for contemplation or debate.

Botur's ranch falls roughly in the middle of Sublette County, and it is a place of surprising fertility, as if the dry plains had decided to make up for the miles of sage with a sudden valley of springs and cottonwood trees—a kind of penance in a high basin of dust and forest-fire smoke. But, when I arrived for the cattle drive, earth near the entrance to the ranch had recently been moved to make way for a rig—for a company that had leased the subsurface rights from the federal government. "Energy is the dominant culture now," Botur told me. "We're getting steamrolled by industry. And there's no leadership, no desire, on the part of the federal government to slow it down."

A place in the throes of an energy boom isn't so different from a person in the throes of addiction: there's the denial that things are out of control; there's the sleeplessness and the moral carelessness, and the fact that you're doing something that you know isn't good for you but you just can't stop. "They're going after everything," Botur said. "The impact on this kind of land, with our slow growing season and thin soils, is essentially irreparable." Each well takes up about three acres of land, but that doesn't include the incidental development of roads, water-treatment facilities, pipelines, and housing for rig workers. In the past six years, requirements for rig spacing have been downsized from eighty acres to as few as ten, which means that parts of the plains are now entirely given over to gas development. Since 2000, there has been a forty-six-per-cent decline in mule-deer populations. "I give the government an F-minus for the way they've handled this situation," Botur added. "They've ripped the roots out of the very thing they say they care about: community values, family values, property rights. The way I look at it, the whole soul of a place has been torn out, and for what? You don't put a soul back into a place once it's gone."

By midmorning, an hour and a half into the cattle drive, Davis, Bencomo, Botur, and I had moved twelve hundred head of cattle a couple of miles. Botur rode ahead with his dog, Miso, to manage the lead; Bencomo and Davis kept the middle of the drive moving with their dog, Lizzy, and I was left to do what I could at the back. Lizzy worked the hills, bringing down stray cows, her tongue bleeding where she'd caught it on brush. It had been below freezing when we set out along willow bottoms, moving the complaining cattle slowly toward the ranch pastures. By midday, it was seventy degrees, and a dry wind had sucked the moisture from our faces. The drive funnelled up a gulch and onto a county road. Davis and Bencomo rode the steep slopes with an instinct for badger holes and sagebrush, pressing the cows up and over the rise with increasing urgency.

As I crested the rim with the last of the cattle, I could see the body of the drive a mile away, meandering over flax-yellow pasture. Botur was already out of sight. Bencomo and Davis were debating the merits of going back for a stray now or later, and what, if anything, to do about Lizzy's tongue (she seemed oblivious to her wound). For a moment, I felt as if it were 1906. And then, in the distance, the thundering of an oil truck on the gravel road intruded. Although the truck slowed before it reached us, the startled cattle veered off in separate panic-stricken threads. It takes momentum and patience to form cattle into a steady river of movement, and a weary herd can seem even more stupid than a rested one; now the confused cows milled by the side of the road, started little cattle drives of their own, or turned and headed back for the pasture we'd just removed them from. Lizzy panted up at Bencomo. "Now what?" she seemed to be saying. ♦

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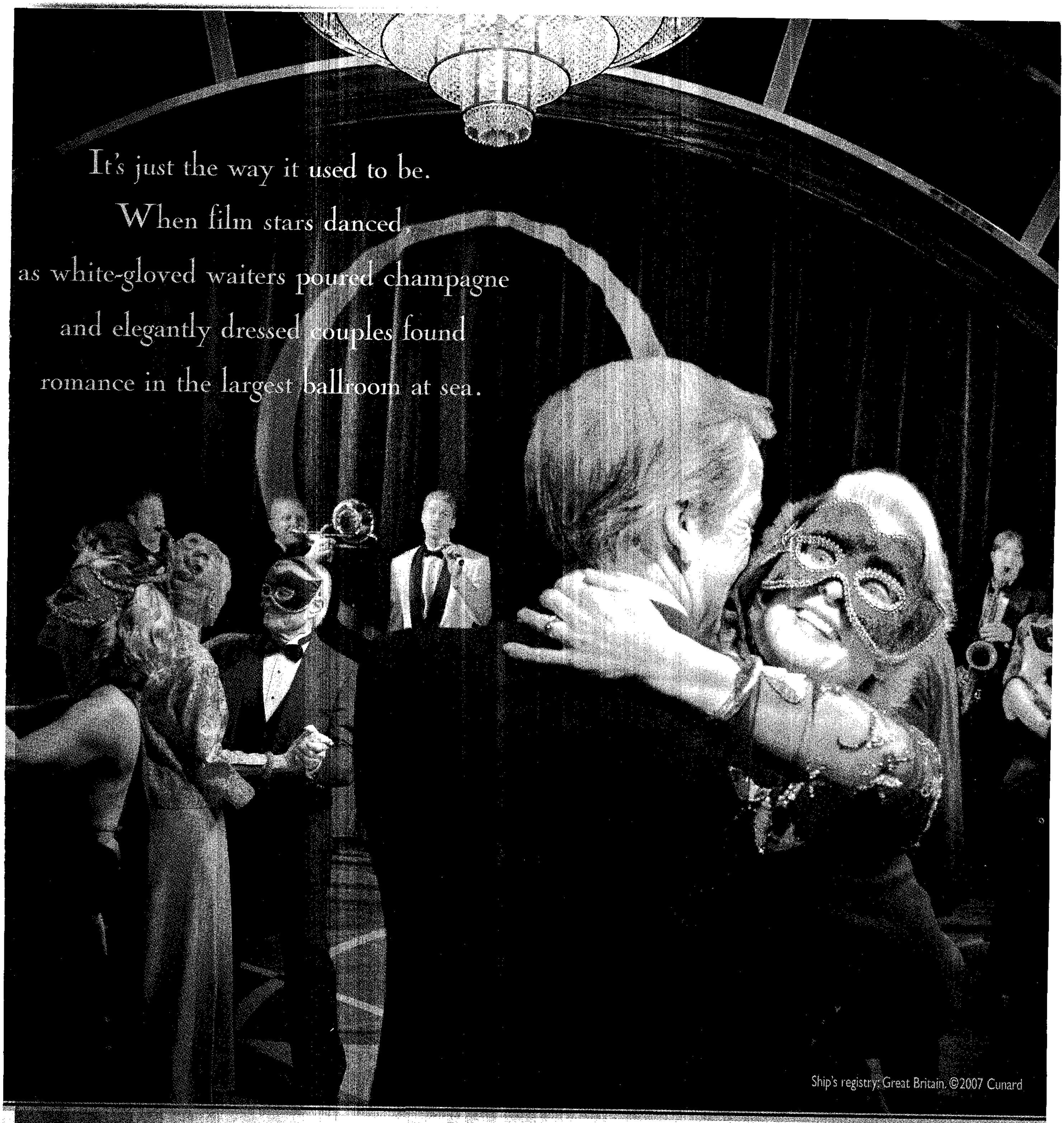
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Where is Jalal Talabani taking Iraq?

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

On November 5th, the day Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death, Jalal Talabani, the longtime Kurdish guerrilla leader, who is currently Iraq's President, was in Paris, on a state visit. He was installed in the sumptuous Presidential Suite at Le Meurice, a gold-and-marble Louis XVI hotel on the Rue de Rivoli, overlooking the Jardin des Tuileries. I watched the verdict with Talabani in his suite, on a large plasma-screen television tuned to the satellite channel Al Arabiya. He sat in a gilded chair, and, when I glanced at him to see his reaction, his expression betrayed nothing. Soon, after a few curt words, Talabani got up and wandered off to his bedroom. One of his aides, part of an entourage travelling with him, tiptoed behind him. The aide reappeared a moment later to say that Talabani was sitting in an armchair, deep in thought.

Saddam's death sentence put Talabani in an awkward position. Saddam had been convicted for the mass killing of a hundred and forty-six people in the Shiite village of Dujail in 1982. If he was executed, he would not face a second trial, for the 1988 Anfal campaign, in which as many as a hundred and eighty-six thousand Kurds were killed. Talabani was on the record as being opposed to capital punishment, but, according to the Iraqi constitution, one of his duties was to approve death warrants. In public statements, he had finessed this problem by saying that he would respect any decisions made by Iraq's judiciary. Still, he was in a predicament.

After a while, Talabani returned, in a better mood. He sat down next to me, but we were interrupted by the arrival of two superbly dressed Frenchmen carrying large shopping bags from Façonnable and Ermenegildo Zegna. They approached Talabani, bowed deferentially, and took a pair of dark suits from the bags. One man brandished a measuring tape, and explained that they needed His Excellency to remove some of his clothes for a fitting. Talabani stood up and began struggling to take off his jacket. A valet rushed over to help.

Talabani, who is seventy-three and has the fat cheeks, brush mustache, and large belly of a storybook pastry chef, is renowned for his political cunning, his prodigious love of food and cigars, his sense of humor, his unflagging optimism, and his inability to keep a secret. He is known as Mam Jalal, which means Uncle Jalal in Kurdish. It is a term of both endearment and cautious deference; Talabani has a mercurial personality, with extreme mood swings. He has survived in Iraqi politics largely owing to an ability to outfox his opponents and, sometimes, his allies. Over the years, he has made deals with everyone from Saddam Hussein to Ayatollah Khomeini and both Bush Presidents. He is probably the only person in the world who can claim, truthfully and unapologetically, to have kissed the cheeks of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran. Talabani refers to George W. Bush as his "good friend" but regards Mao Zedong as his political role model.

"There is no one like him," Adnan Mufti, a longtime friend of Talabani's, told me. "Mam Jalal can make two different policies at once; he can make war and peace at the same time."

Mowaffak al-Rubaie, a Shiite politician who is Iraq's national-security adviser, told me, "He's very difficult to define. If you are an Islamist, he brings you Koranic verses; if you're a Marxist, he'll talk to you about Marxist-Leninist theory, dialectics, and Descartes. He has a very interesting ability to speak several languages, sometimes"—he laughed—"with a very limited vocabulary. He has a lot of anecdotes and knows a lot of jokes. He is an extraordinarily generous person, and he spends like there is no tomorrow."

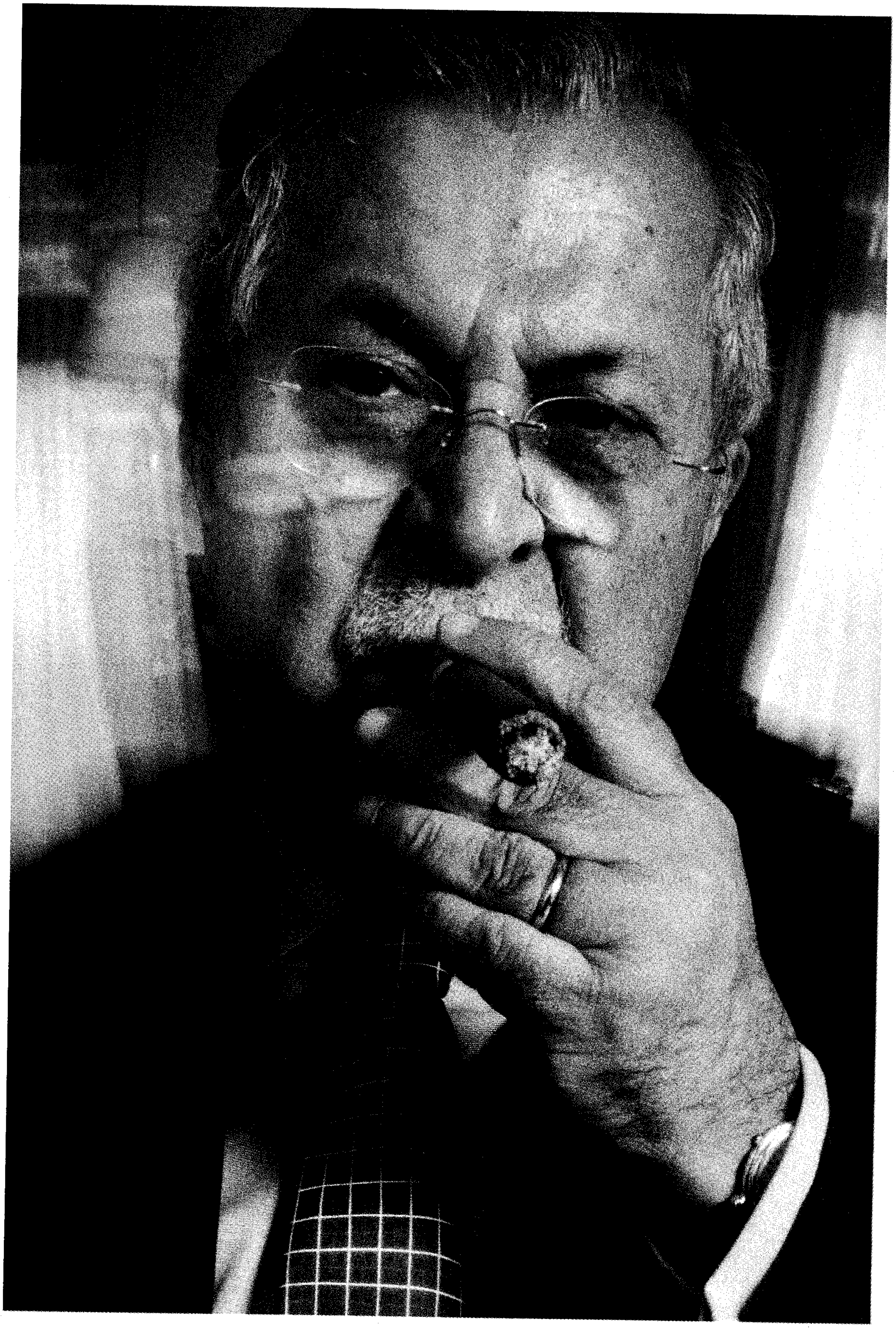
Rubaie mentioned a period in the sixties when Talabani was allied with Saddam. "One day he was a good friend of Saddam Hussein, and then he became a staunch enemy," he said. (In fact, Talabani flirted with Saddam twice more.) Rubaie saw nothing contradictory in this; Talabani, he said, was the ultimate pragmatist. "There are no permanent enemies for him," he said. "But there are permanent friends."

Similarly, Adel Abdul Mahdi, a Shiite who is one of Iraq's two Vice-Presidents, said, "Some people might see his flexibility as shifting from one principle to another, but it's the need to confront sometimes contradictory challenges—to survive." No other Iraqi politician has Talabani's experience, contacts, and savvy. As a result, he has made the Presidency, which was meant to be more ceremonial than the Prime Minister's job, a powerful post. Mahdi added, "No one can contradict you when you say Mam Jalal is a historic figure in Iraq."

Yet this role, too, carries contradictions. After spending decades fighting for "self-determination" for Iraq's Kurds, Talabani finds himself defending Iraq's unity. He now has a choice to make: either he can be a founding father of the "new Iraq"—the elder statesman who will help rescue it from civil war—or, if Iraq falls apart, he can be a founding father of an independent Kurdish state. As always, Talabani has hedged his bets. "I am a Kurd from Iraqi Kurdistan, but now I am responsible for Iraq," he told me. "And I feel my responsibility." In another conversation, he said, "It's true that I am an Iraqi, but in the final analysis I am a Kurd."

Under Saddam, the Kurds "were facing a dictatorship in Baghdad that was launching a war of annihilation against

Talabani is the ultimate pragmatist. A friend says, "He can make two different policies at once." Photograph by William Klein.



the Kurdish people," he said. "We were in need of all kinds of support from anybody in the world. When war starts, and you participate in it, you will need support from anyone. Stalin once coöperated with Hitler to keep peace with him. Churchill supported Stalin in the war against Hitler. In war, you have no choice. You have to fight or surrender; if you are fighting, you have a need for help. Where does the help come from? Anywhere! You cannot ask. There is no supermarket where you can go and choose your friends in a war."

In the current war, some of his unreconciled friendships have been troublesome. Iran was once one of the Kurds' greatest allies, and Talabani had planned to fly from Paris to Tehran. But he abruptly postponed the trip at the request of the Bush Administration: he would have arrived in Tehran on November 6th, and the prospect of pictures of America's Iraqi ally visiting Iran the day before the midterm elections made the White House uncomfortable.

Talabani's stay in Paris included an appearance at the French National Assembly and a private meeting with President Jacques Chirac. Talabani came with gifts for each of the French V.I.P.s he met. ("He's a great believer in prezzies," Rubaie told me. "I don't think he's ever visited anyone without bringing a gift.") Ségolène Royal, the Socialist candidate for President of France, was given a hand-woven Kurdish kilim and a two-foot silver sculpture of a date palm, Iraq's national tree. "There were thirty million of these trees in Iraq before Saddam Hussein—now there are only ten million," Talabani informed her. Royal looked slightly confused but graciously accepted the gift.

Talabani was also in France to talk about oil. Estimates of Kurdistan's reserves range as high as forty-five billion barrels. In 2005, the regional Kurdish government, on its own authority, signed an exploration agreement with a Norwegian firm, which has begun drilling wells, and Turkish, British, and Canadian companies either have signed contracts or are in negotiations. (The Kurds fought hard for clauses in the new constitution, ratified in 2005, which they read as giving them the power to make such deals.) Until the nineties, France was among Saddam's closest European allies and business partners, and in 2003 opposed the U.S.-led war to oust him. For a time, the Americans punished the French by shutting them out of business deals in the "new Iraq," but those days are over. In his suite at Le Meurice, Talabani met with the C.E.O. and another executive of the French oil company Total.

"I want to say that Total and France are welcome in Iraq," Talabani told the French executives. "Iraq needs friends like Total."

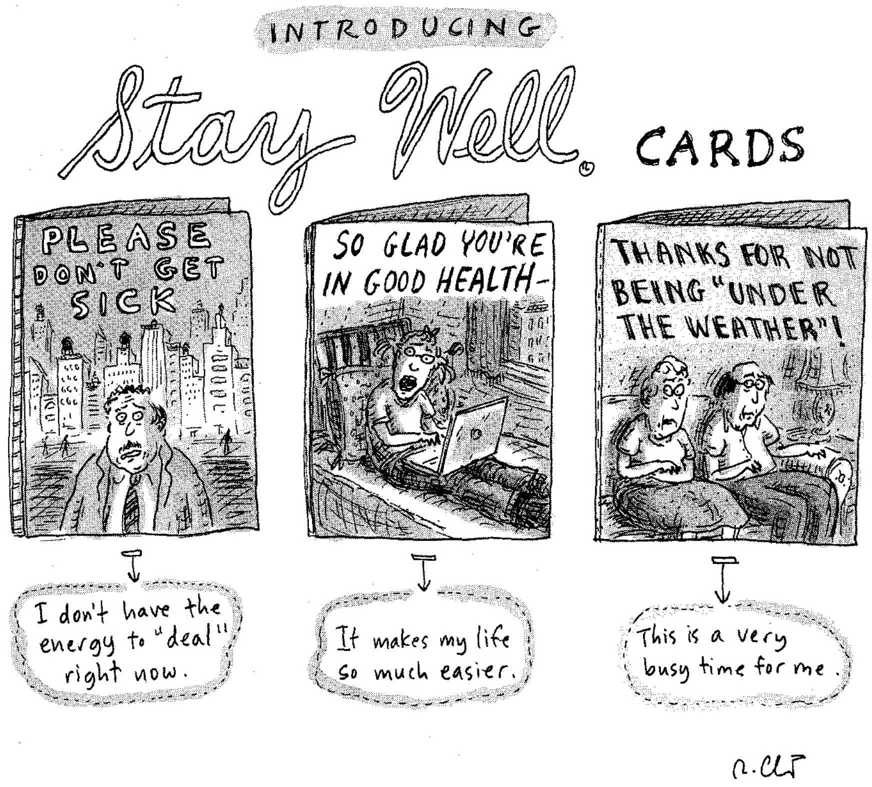
The Frenchmen agreed. The company was putting together a joint venture with an American partner, one executive said, in the hope that the U.S. military would help with security. No one mentioned that, two weeks earlier, one of Total's directors and a former senior executive had been detained for questioning regarding bribes and kickbacks that Total allegedly paid for Iraqi oil under the scandal-ridden Oil for Food Program. (Total denies any wrongdoing.)

One of the executives said that Total was not interested only in oil. "We have brought some Iraqi children with heart defects to France for surgery," he said.

Talabani replied, "What would be really useful is to have a heart hospital *there*." Kurdistan, he said, would be the ideal spot; it was secure enough so that a Chinese mobile-phone company had recently set up operations there. Talabani smiled and stared expectantly at the Frenchmen. They exchanged a few words in rapid-fire French, and then one of them muttered something noncommittal.

Once his official Paris schedule had ended, Talabani spent several days seeing old friends, such as Danielle Mitterrand, the former French First Lady, who had championed the Kurdish cause for many years. Mme. Mitterrand, who lives in an old house with tiny, low ceilinged rooms on a back street in Sainte-Germaine, ushered Talabani and his retinue into her dining room, where, on a rustic table, she had placed a small plate of quiche, cut into dainty slices.

Talabani had barely arranged his bulk on a little chair before he launched into an effusive discourse about how conditions had improved in Kurdistan since she had been there. (Mme. Mitterrand had visited in 2002, for the opening of a new Carrefour superstore, which bore the name of her late husband, in the Kurdish capital of Erbil.) "There are now twenty billionaires and two thousand millionaires in Sulaimaniya alone!" Talabani said. The smile on the face of the staunchly Socialist Mme. Mitterrand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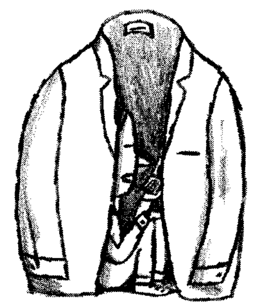
seemed to freeze at this unexpected revelation, but she quickly recovered.

On November 8th, Talabani's chief of staff signed the bill at Le Meurice, which reportedly came to more than half a million dollars. (Talabani's suite alone cost thirteen thousand dollars a night.) French security men drove us to Orly's V.I.P. terminal, and we took off for Iraq on a chartered 767 that flew the colors of Iraqi Airways but was licensed in Djibouti and flown by an American pilot. The jet was said to be owned by a wealthy Iraqi businessman. When it was time for dinner, the flight attendants, who were Iraqi, served Talabani first, after a valet had fastened a Presidential bib around his neck.

In Baghdad, Talabani lives in a yellow brick mansion on the eastern shore of the Tigris River, outside the Green Zone. Until April, 2003, when Talabani seized it, the mansion belonged to Barzan al-Tikriti, Saddam Hussein's half brother and the former chief of the secret police, who, like Saddam, was sentenced to die for his role in the Dujail massacre. (Barzan was executed on January 15th, but his hanging was bungled when the rope ripped off his head.) The Presidential offices are next door, in a palace that once belonged to Saddam's wife Sajida. The palace was looted and damaged after the American invasion in 2003; Talabani had it restored. I had visited the palace a couple of days after Saddam was overthrown, and found its marble floors littered with children's scooters, and, oddly, several chain saws in the master bedroom. The centerpiece of the domed foyer was a large Hussein family portrait made of inlaid marble. The portrait has been removed but, as before, the palace is furnished with faux French antique furniture. Talabani's official Presidential offices lie within the Green Zone, but he rarely visits them.

Talabani's complex sits on the north side of the ramparts of the Jadiriya Bridge; on the south side is the home of his political ally Abdulaziz al-Hakim, the Shiite leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Hakim's house is where Tariq Aziz, Saddam's Deputy Prime Minister, once lived. The approaches on Talabani's side are heavily guarded by Kurdish peshmerga ("those who face death") fighters—Talabani commands some fifty thousand peshmerga in the militia of his party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, or P.U.K.—and on Hakim's by militiamen of the Badr Organization, his party's armed wing. More gunmen from both groups are posted across the river and along the half-mile stretch of avenue that leads to the Green Zone.

The two leaders and their militias work closely on political and security matters, though in other ways the Kurds, who are largely secular, and the Shiites, who are very devout, present a sharp contrast in styles. During weeks spent in Talabani's company, I never saw him or any of his aides pray. Talabani is not averse to alcohol, either, and he enjoys playing cards with a small group of his cronies. One day, I watched from a car as men from Hakim's compound, in black athletic uniforms, got ready for a soccer game on a dusty, fenced-off section of the narrow strip of vacant land between the two security corridors. Before the game, Islamic prayers were intoned through a megaphone; the players stood with their heads bowed. A Kurdish official who was in my car shook his head. "What does God have to do with *sports*?" He turned to me and added, "You see what we have to deal with?"



Talabani's wife, Hero, does not live in Baghdad with her husband. She stays in their home city of Sulaimaniya, where she runs a foundation and a television station, and publishes a newspaper. Years ago, Hero taught herself how to operate a video camera, and she filmed battles between peshmerga fighters and the Iraqi Army. She and Talabani have two sons: one, Bafel, runs the counterinsurgency wing of his father's party; the other, Qubad, represents the autonomous Kurdish government in the U.S.

At home in Baghdad one morning, Talabani invited me up to his private quarters. It was early, and he was still dressed in loose-fitting pajama bottoms and an immense yellow-and-blue striped rugby shirt. A valet brought us Nescafé stirred with sugar into a creamy mixture. (I later learned that this was "Mam Jalal style.") Talabani lit a cigar. (He favors the long ones known as Churchills.) The day before, two suicide bombers had blown themselves up at a police recruitment center just outside the Green Zone, killing thirty-eight potential recruits. It was the latest incident in what almost everyone but Talabani acknowledged was an accelerating sectarian war. "I don't think Iraq is on the eve of a civil war," he said stubbornly. "Day by day—and this is not an exaggeration—Sunni and Shiite leaders are coming close to each other."

Iraq's main problem was not sectarianism, he said, but a terrorist war waged by Baathists and foreign forces like Al Qaeda. Without losing his habitual equanimity, he added that the situation had been made worse by American ineptitude, arrogance, and naïveté, saying, "I think the main one responsible for this was Rumsfeld"—Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who had resigned days earlier. (Talabani has since welcomed President Bush's plan to send an additional twenty-one thousand five hundred American soldiers to Baghdad in a so-called "surge." He said in a statement that it showed "a new effort to improve security in Iraq" and that it "concurs and corresponds with Iraq's plans and ideas"—although some members of the government had been openly skeptical. His media adviser Hiwa Osman told me, "As far as we are concerned, the Americans are liberators. If they want to decrease or increase their troops, we are not going to object.")

After breakfast, Talabani went downstairs to deal with the affairs of the day. A half-dozen senior personnel were waiting, as they do each morning; among them was Wafik al-Samarrai, a former general in Saddam's military intelligence service, who defected to Talabani in the mid-nineties. He is Talabani's national-security adviser, and runs his security team, which includes several South African military veterans. When Talabani has an appointment elsewhere, he is driven in a BMW 7 Series armored black saloon, preceded and followed by a sizable fleet of white Nissan Patrols carrying peshmerga guards. But, more often than not, people come to Talabani. His meetings tend to go on all day, and, punctuated only by meals, late into the night.

It is a measure of Talabani's ascendancy that Nuri al-Maliki, the Prime Minister, usually comes to Talabani, rather than vice versa. Maliki is the third Prime Minister since 2004, while Talabani has been a constant fixture. Maliki does not have Talabani's access to American and other foreign leaders, and must often work through him. In public, Talabani tries to defer to Maliki, and he appears to wish him to succeed. This winter, reports were circulating that the White House had misgivings about Maliki, and that Iyad Allawi, the former Prime Minister, was the Americans' favored candidate for a "strongman" to replace him. Talabani scoffed, telling me, "Allawi! He cannot even control his own family." He added, "Maliki can be a strongman—if we support him."

Talabani with (from left) Saddam Hussein, Nuri al-Maliki, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Donald Rumsfeld,

GETTY IMAGES; ALI HAIDER/REUTERS/NEWSCOM; KARIM SAHIB/AFP/GETTY/NEWSCOM

While I was at Talabani's house, a Sunni Arab sheikh from Anbar province came to ask for help in obtaining weapons. His tribe would fight the terrorists, he said, if it had the arms. (When he left, Talabani told me he thought that the Americans should give such tribal leaders guns; they had held back, he said, out of fear that the guns might be used against American troops.) Next, Talabani met with the Russian Ambassador, and, according to minutes I obtained, they discussed a weapons-buying trip to Moscow that Iraqi officials had planned. Talabani said to the Ambassador, "You should tell your companies to come and invest here; the French will be opening an office in Erbil—you should do the same." Talabani repeated a remark he had made to Vladimir Putin: "We are not putting all our eggs in one basket; we are spreading our eggs between American and Russian and French baskets."

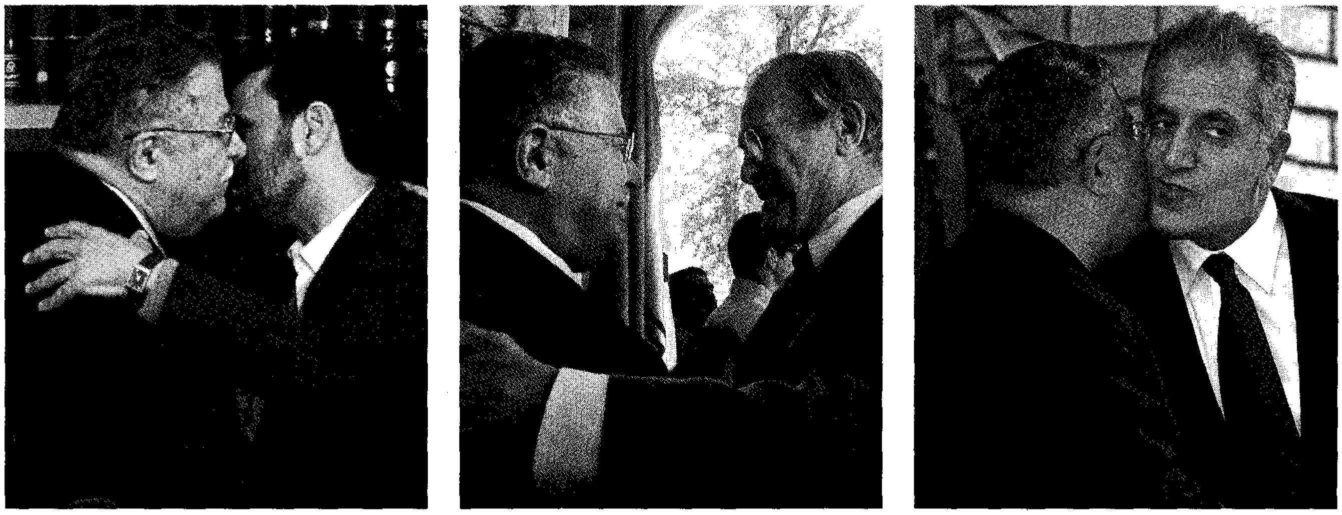
However much the Iraqi government is still tied to U.S. interests, Talabani has no hesitation about exercising—and exceeding—his mandate as President. One example came in 2005, when he clashed with then Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari over who should control a former NATO building in the Green Zone. An armed standoff between Jaafari's guards and Talabani's peshmerga ended only after the American Ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, intervened. Talabani got the building, which he later made available to Maliki.

One source of Talabani's power is his wealth. Together with his old rival Massoud Barzani, who is the President of the autonomous Kurdish region, Talabani is believed to have amassed many millions of dollars in "taxes" on oil smuggled out of Iraq through Kurdistan between 1991 and 2003, when the country was under U.N. sanctions. And Talabani obsessively dispenses gifts, trades favors, and buys allegiances, on the assumption that, in Iraq, the richest suitor has the best chance of winning the bride.

In many ways, Talabani's behavior and his life style are those of a clandestine party boss. He inhabits his mansion as if it were a temporary base camp. His private quarters are cramped, poorly lit, and undecorated, with counters cluttered with satellite phones. His indulgences are food and a large personal staff. He wanders into the kitchen to taste whatever the cooks are making, and plans menus for special guests. He and Ambassador Khalilzad have regular meetings over *kallapacha*, an Iraqi dish consisting of the head and stuffed intestines of a sheep. ("I love *kallapacha*, it's true," Khalilzad told me later, laughing.) Twice a month, Talabani sends consignments of Kurdish yogurt, cheeses, honey, and handmade sweets to foreign ambassadors and leading politicians.

Several of Talabani's aides told me privately about men in his entourage who, they suspected, profited from government contracts that they steered toward their friends. In this, Talabani's circle is not unusual. Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish M.P., is close to Talabani but is scathing about the entire government's profligacy, corruption, and moral cowardice. "How does the government expect to have respect when it is closed off?" he said. "The leaders live in Saddam's palaces, and in the Green Zone, and they never go out. The Prime Minister and the President have discretionary funds to spend as they like of a million or more dollars a month. I think the corruption is widespread and systemic and comes from the very top; it began when the political leaders, including the Kurdish parties, came to Baghdad and seized the best houses for themselves. All of this is against a reality in which the families of killed soldiers or police are given pensions of only a hundred dollars a month."

Before accepting a second term as President, last year, Talabani insisted that his powers be more than ceremonial, and a clause was added to the constitution allowing him to convene a



almay Khalilzad. Over the years, he has made deals with everyone from Ayatollah Khomeini to both Bush Presidents.

VAHID SALEMI/AP; MOHAMMED HATO/REUTERS/NEWSCOM; LIU JIN/AP

biweekly Council on National Security, a conclave of leaders from all parties, including the Prime Minister. The council usually meets at Talabani's palace.

A few hours before one recent meeting, a group of gunmen wearing police uniforms, in cars that bore the markings of the Interior Ministry, which is dominated by Shiites, pulled up outside the Ministry of Higher Education, which is run by a Sunni. The men forced scores of people into the cars, and drove off. In a country where mass abductions have become common, this was by far the most brazen. Sunnis concluded that the kidnappers belonged to a militia operating out of the Interior Ministry. If so, it would be the clearest example yet of how Iraq's sectarian war was being played out within the government itself, ministry by ministry. (The incident is so politicized that no one can agree on the number of victims. Sunnis say up to a hundred and fifty, with eighty missing; Shiites say forty, with all returned safely; and Americans say fifty-five, with many released right away.)

As a result, the national-security meeting, which was supposed to focus on securing Baghdad, descended into angry arguments between Shiites and Sunnis over responsibility for the abductions. According to notes taken by a participant, Prime Minister Maliki berated his squabbling colleagues, saying, "You ask me to work, and yet you weaken the government by these disputes. You are the source of half of my problems."

Maliki's government had been cobbled together after four months of tortuous negotiations following the December, 2005, parliamentary elections. The so-called Shia List, including Hakim's party, the Dawa religious parties, and the Sadrists, won forty-one per cent of the vote. The two Kurdish parties, Talabani's and Barzani's, won the second-largest bloc, with twenty-two per cent. The Shiites and the Kurds agreed to form a government with a coalition of Islamist Sunni parties and a secular alliance headed by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, but the choice of a new Prime Minister became a protracted struggle. In the end, the job went to Maliki, a Dawa official, who had the backing of the radical Shiite militia leader Moqtada al-Sadr.

Sadr, a chunky, sullen man in his early thirties, is the son of the cleric Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, a revered figure among Shiites. The elder Sadr was killed in 1999; many Iraqis suspect that he was assassinated on Saddam's orders. Immediately after the U.S. invasion, Moqtada, the cleric's youngest son, who was virtually unknown, gained sudden prominence by openly declaring his opposition to America's presence in Iraq. Within days, he had taken control of Saddam City, a vast Shiite slum of some two million people in northeastern Baghdad, renamed it Sadr City, and begun building his militia, the Mahdi Army. In 2004, about ninety Americans and hundreds of Iraqis were killed when Sadr called for armed resistance after the Coalition Provisional Authority, which had a warrant for his arrest on murder charges, closed down his newspaper. But, after Sadr promised to disarm his militia and enter politics, the Americans backed down.

Sadr did not disarm his militia—it is now more or less directly financed and armed by Iran—and he has become a decisive force. His followers, on his orders, took part in the election, and won the largest number of votes of any Shiite party. Sadr was given control of four ministries, then had his ministers suspend their participation in the government in protest when Maliki met with President Bush at the end of November. A few weeks later, however, as Maliki moved to arrest hundreds of his followers, Sadr ended the boycott. (While contradictory friendships are characteristic of Talabani, contradictory positions distinguish Sadr.)

Talabani helped make sure that many of the high-level jobs that didn't go to Shiites went to Kurds. (A number of them are Talabani's friends and relatives.) One of the two Deputy Prime Ministers is a Kurd, and Kurds head several ministries, including the Foreign Ministry; the Minister of Water Resources is Talabani's brother-in-law. From the American perspective, there is simply an abundance of qualified Kurds—or, at least, many with whom the U.S. feels comfortable. (Khalilzad said that as far back as 2002 he had seen Talabani as a potential President. "He's a good interlocutor; we work well together," Khalilzad told me. "I'm prejudiced, though—he's a friend of mine.")

One of the biggest problems facing all factions in the Iraqi government—and the Americans—is the woeful state of Iraq's armed forces. Much of Iraq's arsenal was destroyed in the 2003 invasion, and its Army was disbanded by the Coalition Provisional Authority. What equipment remained was promptly looted; Talabani and Barzani are believed to have been major beneficiaries of the plunder. As soon as Saddam fell, they sent their peshmerga to haul heavy weapons, including dozens of tanks, back to Kurdistan. Criminal gangs and insurgents took much of what was left.

The training of the "new Iraqi Army" has been a dismal chronology of desertions and corruption. (A former Defense Minister stands accused of stealing more than a billion dollars; he has denied it.) The loyalties of many soldiers are questionable; it is believed that insurgents have infiltrated the ranks, and many soldiers refuse to serve anywhere but in their home provinces. The Army has a hundred and twelve battalions, but, according to testimony by General John Abizaid last fall, none are capable of operating without U.S. help.

The Shiite-dominated Interior Ministry runs the intelligence services and the police. In Baghdad and in southern Iraq, the Badr Organization, Sadr's Mahdi Army, and other militias are believed to control the local police forces: the militias, the death squads that carry out revenge killings, and the police, in other words, are all but indistinguishable. In Sunni areas, the police are similarly compromised. Police are a favorite target for terrorists; some twelve thousand have been killed since 2003.

The Kurdish forces, by and large, have kept to the north, where as many as a hundred thousand are stationed. Barzani has suggested that some could be used in Baghdad or to replace Iraqi troops in the northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul; the obvious subtext is that Kirkuk, which has large oil reserves, would be the Kurds' prize.

After the national-security meeting, I spoke with Vice-President Adel Abdul Mahdi, a secular member of Hakim's party. I had last seen Mahdi a year earlier, at a mourning ceremony for his brother, who had been assassinated, presumably by Sunnis. "We are meeting, but it's not only the nonviolent who are here," he said. "And meanwhile there are those out on the streets who have a lot of force, and guns, and they know what they want to do." Some members of the government "like this situation," he said. "They think they can use it to their benefit, to their political advantage."

Later, in Amman, I heard something similar from former Prime Minister Allawi, who now spends much of his time outside Iraq. He accused people within the Interior Ministry of killing some of his associates; a few days earlier, his chief of security in Baghdad had been tortured to death. "His eyes were taken out and his body was dumped on the street," Allawi said. "And this is the *government* doing it."

Like many politicians, Allawi had stopped expecting the Iraqi Army to provide security. The problem his faction had, Allawi said, was that it didn't have its own militia: "If we did, we'd be stronger."

Talabani and his ally Hakim do not consider their militias to be problems in the way that Sadr's is a problem. Since 2003, in fact, they have tried to persuade the Americans to allow their militias to be placed under a unified command so that they can fight freely against the insurgents. The Americans, fearing Iranian penetration of the Shiite groups, have resisted.

An official in Hakim's party told me, "Instead of letting us act against the Baathists and the terrorists, they made us sit on the fence, and this gave the others—the Mahdi Army and such people—the power of the street." He added, "The problem is that young Shiite men will no longer listen to the Marja"—the paramount Shiite clerical authority—"and their political organizations. They want revenge."

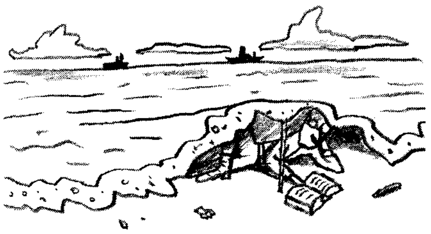
The turning point for Shiites came last February, when bombs destroyed the sacred Shiite shrine of Askariya, in Samarra. The official said, "You have to understand that the Samarra attack was to Shiites what 9/11 was to you Americans."

After Samarra, Sadr's militia carried out indiscriminate reprisals against Sunni civilians. One of his main henchmen in Sadr City, Abu Dera, led death squads that targeted Sunnis and murdered one of Saddam's lawyers. But when I asked a senior Iraqi security official, who is a Shiite, how such activities could be reined in, his response raised its own questions. He pointed out that Abu Dera had relatives in Sadr City, and said, "I'd go and get his family and friends"—in other words, to hold them hostage. "And then I'll sit down with Moqtada and say, 'If you don't hand him over, I'll go loose in Sadr City.' Because he's one of Moqtada's lieutenants. And Moqtada doesn't understand anything but force." The security official smiled.

Talabani, like many senior Iraqi politicians, views Sadr with a mixture of condescension and contempt. ("He is depending on his father's name," he told me.) The key to weakening Sadr, Talabani said, was Iran. "If the Iranians will calm down the Mahdi Army, if there will be no assassination, if these—what do you call them?—'death squads' will be no more, then only the terrorists will remain. And if Syria will be silent, only Al Qaeda will remain, and we can defeat Al Qaeda very easily."

Talabani went on, "One of the main mistakes the Americans have made in fighting terrorism is tying our hands and the hands of the Shiites, while at the same time the terrorists are free to do what they want. If they let us, within one week we will clean all Kirkuk and adjacent areas." (Talabani's implication was clear: "to clean" is a euphemism for wiping out your opposition, for killing or capturing your enemies.)

Talabani then adopted a high-pitched, whining voice, to mimic the Americans: "'*No-o*, Kurds must not move to the Arab areas, this is *sensitive*.' If they let the Shiites clean the road from Najaf to Baghdad, they can do it within days. If they permit the people of Anbar to liberate their area, they will do it, but they say, 'Ah, no, this is another kind of militia.' They don't understand the realities of Iraq. From the beginning, we have had this problem with them." He added, "Wrong plan, wrong tactic, and wrong policy."

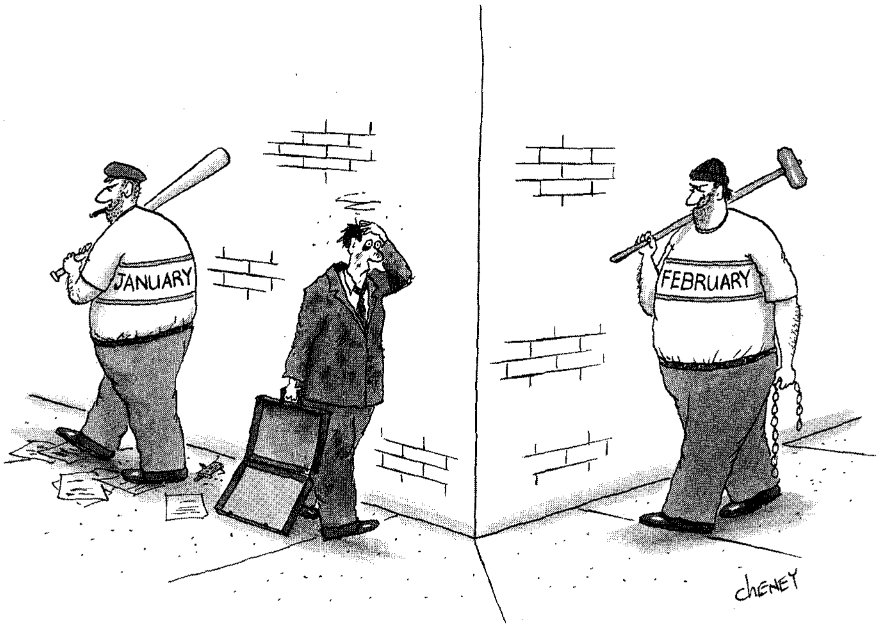


Jalal Talabani has been involved in politics since 1946, when, at the age of thirteen, with Iraq still ruled by the British-installed Hashemite monarchy, he joined an underground Kurdish student organization. It was part of a Kurdish independence movement that had taken shape during the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, after the First World War, when the victorious European powers failed to give the Kurds their own state. The division of the empire left the Kurds spread among Iraq (with an estimated four million Kurds today, or between fifteen and twenty per cent of Iraq's population), Turkey, Syria, and Iran; the greater Kurdistan envisaged by some separatists would encompass parts of each of those countries.

Talabani was born in the village of Kelkan, in southeastern Iraqi Kurdistan, an area dominated by his clan, the Talabanis; his father was a local sheikh. By eighteen, Talabani was the youngest member of the central committee of the Soviet-backed Kurdistan Democratic Party, led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani (the father of Massoud Barzani). He studied law in Baghdad (interrupted by a period spent in hiding) and completed his obligatory service in the Iraqi Army. Then, in 1961, Talabani joined an armed uprising launched by Mustafa Barzani.

Three years later, Talabani split with Barzani to join a splinter group founded by Ibrahim Ahmed, the father of his future wife, Hero. Ahmed did not like the terms of Barzani's negotiations with the central government. This was a period of violent political instability in Iraq, with four Presidents in the space of ten years. After a Baathist coup in 1968, Talabani made a deal with Saddam Hussein, who was then the Deputy President, to obtain more rights for the Kurds and to get his help in fighting Barzani—only to reconcile with Barzani when Saddam switched sides. It was the beginning of a dizzying sequence of schisms within the Kurdish rebellion, for which Talabani bears significant responsibility, and which, for a time, strengthened Saddam.

Talabani was a Marxist, and then a Maoist, attracted by "Mao's idea of popular war, of fighting in the mountains against dictatorship." He had travelled to China in 1955, at the head of an Iraqi Socialist student delegation. "I met with Chou En-lai," the Chinese Prime Minister, Talabani recalled. "I kissed him, too. And I saw Chairman Mao. But not from very close." He was also drawn to the anti-colonial Arab nationalist causes of the day. On trips during the nineteen-sixties, he made important contacts—with Gamel Abdel Nasser of Egypt, King Hussein of Jordan, Muammar Qaddafi, Yasir Arafat, and President Hafez al-Assad of Syria. (In Talabani's office, there is a single photograph on the wall, of him with Assad. "He was very, very kind to me," Talabani said.)



In the mid-seventies, Talabani spent time in Beirut, working with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Marxist Palestinian guerrilla organization. It is a murky period about which Talabani says little, but Kurds close to him suggest that he was then at his most radical, and at one point became involved in a Palestinian plot to hijack an American plane in Europe. He is said to have abandoned the scheme when a contact warned him that Mossad planned to assassinate him.

"We considered the U.S. the enemy of the Iraqi Kurdish people," Talabani told me. Through the eighties, the U.S., for its part, saw the Kurds primarily as troublemakers and as pawns of Syria and Iran. In Turkey, America's NATO ally, Kurdish separatists had been waging a remorseless guerrilla war, to which the Turkish military responded with a vicious counterinsurgency campaign; thousands of Kurdish civilians were killed.

At the height of the Iran-Iraq War, Talabani once again allied himself with Saddam, then opposed him and helped Iran. Saddam's next move was the genocidal Anfal campaign.

Saddam razed thousands of Kurdish villages, primarily in Talabani's territory. In the town of Halabja, between March 16 and March 17, 1988, five thousand Kurdish civilians were killed when planes dropped a lethal chemical cocktail that reportedly included mustard gas and nerve agents like sarin, tabun, and VX. Although these attacks later became part of the current Bush Administration's case for overthrowing Saddam, the Reagan Administration, which was supporting Saddam in his war with Iran, paid little attention; when the news of Halabja broke, the White House blamed Iran.

After the Anfal campaign, Talabani lived in Damascus and Tehran, amongst other places. "We were trying to have good relations with the United States, but at that time the United States was siding with Saddam Hussein—with the governments of Iraq and Turkey, and other countries," Talabani said. "I must tell you that even when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the State Department was not ready to listen to me. I went to the United States, but it refused to see me."

After Saddam's defeat in the first Gulf War, in early 1991, Shiites in the south and Kurds in the north carried out uprisings. Talabani led his forces into Sulaimaniya and Kirkuk. With the U.S. looking on, Saddam dispatched his Army against them. Hundreds of thousands of

Kurds fled, in the midst of a harsh winter, provoking a humanitarian crisis. The U.S. and its allies declared a safe haven in the north; Talabani and Barzani (who had temporarily reconciled) began negotiating terms of settlement with Saddam.

There is an unfortunate photograph from this period that shows Talabani kissing Saddam on the cheek. "But, you know, at that time the Kurdish people were in danger of being annihilated," Talabani told me, by way of explanation.

Saddam, he said, "was very polite. Especially with us. He came to the door to receive us and he kissed us. He was very friendly in the meeting." The talks unravelled, but not before Talabani exchanged what he called "tough words" with Tariq Aziz, the Deputy Prime Minister, about Halabja. When he met Saddam afterward, Talabani said, Saddam apologized for Aziz's lack of manners and, without expressing further regret, said, "I understand your feelings about Halabja and Anfal."

Talabani also met with Saddam's cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid, who is known as Chemical Ali because of his role in the attacks. (Majid is now on trial in Baghdad. In a tape played in court, he is heard discussing his plans to use chemical weapons; in another, he calls Talabani "wicked and a pimp because he even wants a truce for one day in order to depict himself as a savior of the Kurds.") In the meeting, according to Talabani, Majid told him, "You are exaggerating—the number killed in Anfal is not a hundred and eighty-two thousand, it is only a hundred and six thousand." Talabani laughed.

"Fighting is not playing Ping-Pong," Talabani said. "Fighting is killing each other. When we were fighting Saddam Hussein, we killed them, they killed us. It's something ordinary. It's war. And when we stop the war both killers sit down to receive each other. And this happens all over the world. Mao, he sat down with Chiang Kai-shek! Chiang Kai-shek killed his wife. His son! And thousands and thousands of Communists. But when the time came to talk peace they must sit down with each other. This is the process of life."

As the Kurdish "safe haven" developed into a "no fly zone" policed by U.S. and British warplanes—a de-facto Kurdish autonomous zone, beyond the authority of Saddam Hussein—Barzani and Talabani fought for preëminence. One dispute was over revenues from oil smuggling.

"Jalal is at his best when he is down, and is prone to making mistakes when he is up," a longtime friend of Talabani's told me. "In 1991, he was emerging as a statesman of the Kurds, internationally renowned. Instead of moving to become the nation builder that he was supposed to be, he moved into battle, playing with fire, undermining all that he built. He would not like me to say this: he is a risk taker, perhaps even a gambler."

In 1994, a civil war broke between the armies of Talabani and Barzani. In the midst of the fighting, Talabani provided a base for a C.I.A. task force, and for Ahmed Chalabi, the Iraqi exile leader, who were involved in various failed coup plots. Talabani launched an offensive against Saddam's forces, but it also failed. Hundreds of people died in these efforts. Talabani continued fighting Barzani, who at one point, astoundingly, invited Saddam's Army into the north.

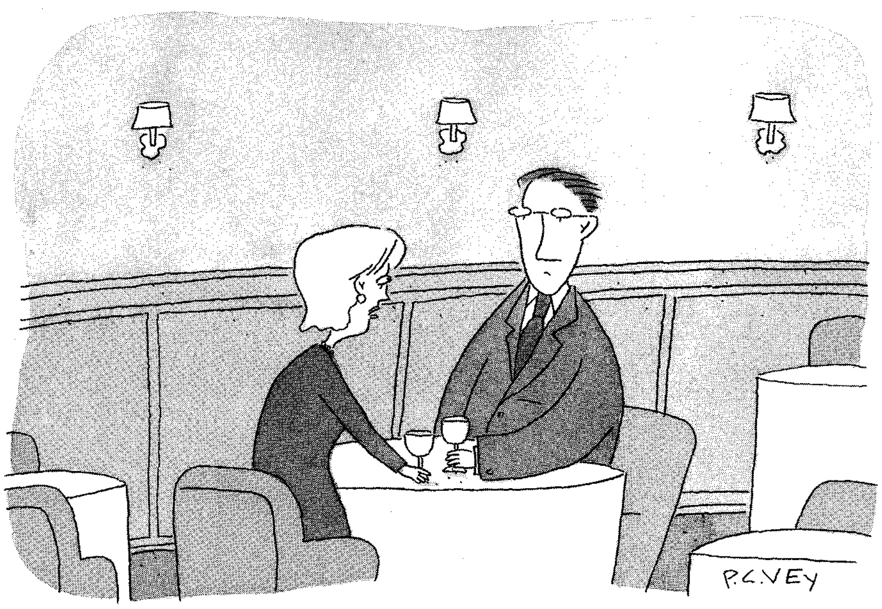
When President Clinton signed the Iraq Liberation Act, in 1998, promising American support for Iraqi opposition groups, Talabani and Barzani went to Washington and settled their differences. By then, ten thousand or more Kurds from both sides had been killed. "They fought, they literally fought—and with so many casualties," Rubaie said. "But now they are friends."

Kurdish history suggests that nothing is permanent, however. When I asked a close friend of Talabani's if the days of fratricidal violence would return, he said that he couldn't rule it out.

For some in Washington, giving the Kurds an independent homeland in the north and the Shiites a home in the south, leaving the Sunnis in the center—dividing Iraq into three parts—has come to seem like a way out of a civil war. The leading advocate of this view is Peter Galbraith, a former State Department official, who in "The End of Iraq," a book published last year, wrote that "every Kurd I know wants an independent Kurdistan." (In a 2005 referendum, ninety-eight per cent of Kurds in the autonomous region voted for independence.)

"He is sometimes writing wishful thinking," Talabani said of Galbraith. "If he says that there is no Kurd who does not want to see an independent Kurdistan, in some way it's true. But there is not, I think, a realistic Kurdish leader who would say, 'We want independence.' Why? Because it is impossible.

"Let me tell you: I am a socialist"—he paused at that self-description and added, "in my opinion"—"but I think it is impossible to create a socialist society now in Iraq. Let us imagine that Iraqi Kurdistan declared independence, and Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Iraq didn't fight it but just closed their borders. How could we live? Let us say, we've got our oil—how could we export it?" He went on, "And you can



"I'd feel more comfortable if you'd move to a different table."

be sure that if Kurdistan declares independence Iran *will* attack, Turkey will attack, Syria will attack—and Iraq will not accept it. We cannot resist all these countries."

Later, Galbraith told me that although he knew that Talabani wanted independence, it would be "suicidal" now. He added, "It's also true that he is serving the Kurdish cause by being President of Iraq. First, by helping to keep the authority the Kurds now enjoy, and, second, by being an outsized player in Iraq, he can better promote the Kurdish cause."

Talabani seems to share that view. "Before, we were faced by Arab anger," he told me. "But now, when Arabs themselves are asking, 'Please send peshmerga, send Kurdish forces to calm down the area,' we must reply. Nowadays, they feel the Kurds are their protectors."

Indeed, according to an official who attended an emergency security meeting in late November—convened after a quintuple car bombing killed more than two hundred Shiite civilians—Mahmoud al-Mashadani, the Sunni speaker of parliament, asked Talabani to bring peshmerga to Baghdad.

At the meeting, Maliki complained that the Americans were not giving him enough control over security. His troops didn't even have heavy machine guns, because the Americans wouldn't let them.

"My dear brother Maliki," Talabani said, according to the participant, "we are all with you, and we will try and work with our American friends. And don't worry—we can try to get you heavy weapons secretly." When he said this, Talabani put a finger over his mouth and said, theatrically, "Sh-h-h."

When the bipartisan Iraq Study Group's report was published, on December 6th, Talabani was incensed. Among other things, the report called for increased American involvement in the Iraqi Army's military operations and central government control over Iraq's oil revenues (it said that regional deal-making was incompatible with national reconciliation). Talabani called the report "unfair" and "unjust"; he compared it to terms imposed on a "colony."

One recommendation that Talabani had no problem with was that President Bush begin direct talks with Syria and Iran. "It is in our interest that relations between the U.S. and Iran about Iraq be at least normal, and if they have other differences let them take them to other parts of the world," he had told me a couple of weeks earlier. He was about to leave for his delayed trip to Iran, which he was coördinating with Maliki and others in the government. He was also keeping the Americans informed. "One thing I must tell you," he said. "We never hide our relation with Iran from America."

When I asked Khalilzad about Talabani's initiatives with Iran, he said, cautiously, that they could potentially be useful, but added, "I know he has good relations with the Iranians, a long history of dealing with them. But I think on Iran he is a little too optimistic in his comments and a little too optimistic about the Iranians' performance and their intentions. I am more suspicious of them. I think that he actually is, too, because he knows them very well."

The Iraqis are aware that their country is not the only concern the U.S. has with Iran—there is also Iran's nuclear program and its support for Hezbollah and Hamas. The senior Shiite security official said that even if Talabani won concessions the U.S. would have to follow up with negotiations, because Iran "will take advantage of this and try to impose the nuclear issue on them. But this is their issue, between them."

One senior Kurdish official told me that Iran had to be "shown that Iraq and the U.S don't come to the table empty-handed. They need to be hit back in the same way, through their ethnic minorities." He named several groups, including the Azeris, the Baluchis, and, of course, the Kurds. He said that I should pay attention to the Kurdistan Free Life Party, an Iranian Kurdish group that has staged guerrilla attacks inside Iran and has reportedly received covert U.S. support. (The Pentagon declined to comment.) "It's operating out of Mam Jalal's territory in Kurdistan," he said.

Tehran was cold and gray on November 27th, when Talabani and his entourage arrived in the same 767 that had flown them to Paris. Several ministers and a clutch of Iraqi journalists and photographers were on board.

During our descent into Tehran, one of Talabani's junior aides came down the aisles, handing each person a form to sign. It was printed in Arabic, and, assuming it was an official landing document of some sort, I did so, whereupon he handed me a thick envelope and moved on. Inside were twenty hundred-dollar bills. After we landed, I asked the aide why he had given me money, and he said it was "a gift from the President." I thanked him, but said that I could not accept it, and handed the envelope back. He looked very confused.

A senior aide translated my explanations about "journalistic ethics," which left the man looking only more mystified. The senior aide then opened his own envelope and, whistling, counted out fifty hundred-dollar bills. "I think he's given me the same amount as the ministers," he exclaimed. "He does this from his own pocket, you know." He said that, on each trip, Talabani gives money to all those on board, including the bodyguards, the flight attendants, and the pilot. We calculated that during the one-hour flight Talabani had given away about a hundred thousand dollars.

In Tehran, Talabani was ushered into a black Mercedes limousine while the rest of us were driven in smaller cars. As we made our way through the city, the contrast with Baghdad was striking. There were no armed soldiers or blast walls and security barricades to negotiate; instead, we drove through street after street of brightly lit stores with neon signs; the sidewalks were full of people, casually window-shopping or running errands. But what most caught the attention of the Iraqis was the large number of women and girls out on the street; the sight of women in public has become a rarity in Baghdad. A couple of the men in my car became rambunctious, taking snapshots of women with their camera phones.

The next morning, Talabani awoke early and visited the tomb of Ayatollah Khomeini. Then he met with President Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Sources close to Talabani told me that in their talks he requested a reversal in Iran's policy—specifically, that Iran's leadership "control" Sadr's militia and ally itself instead with his government, and that it persuade its allies and proxies, including Syria, Hamas, and Hezbollah, to do the same. Talabani then asked that Iran open up communications with the multinational forces in Iraq, and coöperate with the Iraqi and U.S. governments in their security plan for Baghdad. And, perhaps most controversial from the Americans' point of view—assuming that they knew about it—Talabani proposed that Tehran and Baghdad exchange intelligence, and that Iran help train and equip Iraq's security forces.

One of the Iraqis who attended the meeting said that Talabani told Khamenei that Iraq was "at a make-or-break point and needed Iran's help." He went on, "The Supreme Leader said that he understood and would do everything he could. In return, he wanted the Iraqis to take more control over their own security from the Americans."

The officials in Talabani's entourage felt that the talks were going well. One told me that, as Talabani spoke about the violence in Iraq, Khamenei had repeatedly said, "Oh, how terrible, we are praying for you." Finally, Talabani interrupted him: "What we need is not prayers, we need medicine," to which Khamenei replied, "I will provide the prayers and he"—he gestured toward Ahmadinejad—"will provide the medicine."

Later, at a press conference, Ahmadinejad said, "Iraq is like a wounded hero." Talabani, standing next to him, said, smiling, "We can only hope that he recovers." The crowd laughed; it was a classic Mam Jalal moment. Ahmadinejad added, "The best way to support Iraq is to support its democratically elected government." However disingenuous this may have sounded under the circumstances, Talabani's officials took it as a further sign that the Iranians were prepared to help. They told me it was the first time that the Iranians had explicitly endorsed the current Iraqi government.

An Iraqi minister came up to me afterward, looking enthusiastic, and said, "You see? I told you it was more than symbolic!" After a short pause, the official leaned over and whispered excitedly, "These guys even offered us *weapons!*"

That evening, I asked a senior Iraqi official whether he thought that the Iranians would come through. He said, "Let's see—you never know with these guys."

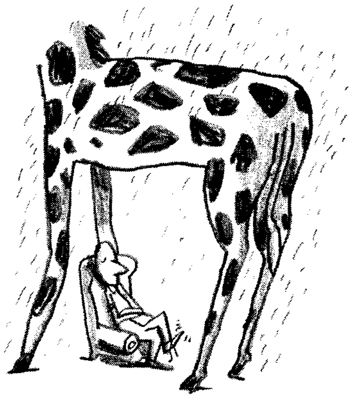
The official said that he was worried about the "mixed messages" coming from the West. "I emphasized with the Iranians that they should not just assume that because the Americans were bogged down in Iraq they were incapable of taking action against Iran; I said that they were entirely capable of it."

Later, the official recounted a conversation he had had with the Iranian President: "Ahmadinejad said, 'We are prepared for the worst-case scenario.'" The official said that Ahmadinejad did not seem to be bluffing. "He said that they have been importing food intensively for the past three months, and stockpiling it."

The next afternoon, we departed for Baghdad. One of Talabani's bodyguards was carrying a gift the President had received: a large framed carpet with a likeness of Talabani woven into it.

On December 3rd, Christopher Shays, a Republican congressman from Connecticut, and Ambassador Khalilzad paid Talabani a visit at his mansion in Baghdad. In addition to the usual Kurdish peshmerga units, a small army of U.S. military vehicles and soldiers stood guard outside. Shays, a hale man of sixty, wearing a blue shirt and tie and khaki trousers, had just narrowly won reëlection to Congress. He had been an ardent advocate of the Iraq war in 2003, and was the first U.S. legislator to visit Iraq after the toppling of Saddam. This trip, as he informed Talabani, was his fifteenth. However, after a visit last August, Shays's position on the war changed. He became the first congressional Republican to call for a timetable for the withdrawal of American troops. In October, he called for the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld.

Talabani seemed to want to reassure Shays about the Republicans' losses in the midterm elections. "When Churchill won the Second World War, he didn't win reëlection," he said. His son Qubad, who lives in Washington, had told him that there were three main issues in the elections: Iraq, health care, and the economy.



"Well, but the war in Iraq was fifty per cent of it," Shays said. He assumed the tone of a man making a speech. "What I need to leave you with is that Iraq is a big issue; about half of my constituents were against it and the other half were for it. And all people see is killing and torture. They ask, 'What good was getting rid of Saddam Hussein if all we see every day is Sunnis and Shiites killing each other?' It's a question I don't know how to answer."

"The U.S. people basically don't understand that we have our rights now," Talabani said. "We have had three elections. In the north it is free, and in the south there are places where it is stable."

It didn't seem to be the answer Shays was looking for, and, a moment later, Talabani changed course. "Let me be frank," he said. "We need to have more for the Iraqi security forces."

"We do have some obligations," Shays said. "We made some huge mistakes—disbanding your armed forces, for example—but my constituents need to see real progress and real efforts on national reconciliation."

The atmosphere in the room had turned brittle. "We must do these things; it's our duty," Talabani told Shays, with an irritated look. "But this country was ruled by a dictatorship." He then began a disquisition on Saddam's rule.

Shays interrupted him. He told Talabani that there needed to be a timetable to get U.S. troops home. He asked, "If the Shia and the Sunni fighting continues, and if the U.S. leaves by the time of the next election, what will happen to Iraq?"

"I'll tell you," Talabani said. "There will be no Iraq."

Toward the end of the meeting, Shays noted that the campaign for the 2008 Presidential election would soon begin. He was supporting John McCain, and he guessed that it would be Hillary Clinton for the Democrats. "In the campaign, there will be a lot more cautious voices on Iraq," he said. "So

"This might appeal—it runs on vitriol."

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improvements need to be made, but not on 'Iraq time.'"

Shays went on, "I grew up studying the greatness of these two great civilizations Egypt and Iraq. We are sensitive to your greatness. We see that you may have more oil than Saudi Arabia, and you have water that could make Iraq the breadbasket of the Middle East. The thing is, we went into Iraq saying Saddam had weapons of mass destruction, and then we said it was because of a vicious dictatorship, but, if my constituents see vicious actions between the people we are supposed to have freed, it becomes very difficult for me."

"I am confident that we can do a lot," Talabani said.

Khalilzad said, "Mr. President, the big question is the sectarian violence."

Talabani repeated that his government was working on it.

It was an odd exchange; Talabani and Shays were like two actors rehearsing a scene but reading from different scripts, neither of which quite fit the moment. At one point, when Shays said that the Iraqis needed to get their house in order, Talabani replied, "It will work if you allow us to build our troops and buy arms and so on—"

"That's your decision," Shays said, interrupting him.

"No, that was your decision," Talabani retorted. "*Now* it's our decision."

Through December, Talabani seemed to be in suspense about his Iran initiative. He had reason to be uneasy, as it turned out. In raids on December 21st, U.S. soldiers captured several Iranians, including two men staying across from Talabani's mansion, in Hakim's compound. The Americans accused the men of being senior Iranian agents, and claimed to have captured documents outlining preparations for attacks in Iraq. Talabani came forward to say that he was "unhappy" about the arrests and that the men were his "guests." After eight days, the Iranians, who had diplomatic passports, were released from U.S. custody and returned to Iran.

According to an official in Talabani's party, Talabani believed that the agents "were acting according to the spirit" of the understanding that he had reached in Iran. Giving the episode a somewhat face-saving spin, the official added that Talabani had been shown the captured Iranian documents and had informed the Americans that there was a "mistranslation"—that in fact the documents outlined "a plan to draw the Mahdi Army closer to Badr"—thus persuading the Americans to release the two men.

Then, on January 11th, a day after President Bush said that the U.S. would act forcefully to end Iranian and Syrian interference in Iraq, American commandos raided an Iranian office in Erbil, the Kurdish capital. Five Iranians were detained, and a firefight nearly broke out between American troops and peshmerga fighters. Barzani vehemently protested the incident, as did Iran. Talabani, who was about to fly to Syria, maintained a discreet silence.

The official in Talabani's party told me that the President had taken offense at the incident in Erbil, especially coming after the one in Baghdad. But then Ambassador Khalilzad came to Sulaimaniya to see Talabani. According to the official, Khalilzad told Talibani to convey to the Syrians, on behalf of the White House, that the U.S. was open to a dialogue. (Khalilzad denies this.) The official added that Talabani's subsequent reception in Syria was very warm, and left him believing that the Syrians were ready to deal. The official noted that, unlike Iran, which has worked the chaos in Iraq to its strategic advantage, all that Syria had got out of the conflict was hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees.

Saddam Hussein's execution, which came at dawn on December 30th, was a clumsy and brutish affair. As he stood on a scaffold with the noose around his neck, he was taunted by some of his hooded executioners and by spectators. Among the last words that he heard were chants invoking the name of Moqtada al-Sadr. Maliki is said to have vehemently resisted the arguments of Ambassador Khalilzad, among others, to wait until after the religious festival of Eid al-Adha, which began for Sunnis that day.

At the time of Saddam's hanging, Talabani was in Sulaimaniya. Hours before the execution, he had found the perfect solution to his dilemma concerning the death warrant. "It couldn't have been any better," Hiwa Osman, his media adviser, explained. "He found that in cases of *international* war crimes the constitution did not give him the authority to alter the court's ruling. In a way, it was a blessing from the sky, and it solved his ethical dilemma."

As for Talabani's reaction to the execution, Osman said, "Remember what he did in Paris when the death sentence was announced, and he went into his bedroom for an hour or so? This time, it lasted three or four days. No one saw him." ♦

PERSONAL HISTORY

THE OPEN WORLD

A legendary travel writer's first trip abroad.

BY RYSZARD KAPUŚCIŃSKI

In 1955, after completing my studies at Warsaw University, I began working at a newspaper called *Sztandar Mlodych* (*The Banner of Youth*). I was a novice reporter, and my beat was to follow letters to the editor back to their point of origin. The writers complained about injustice and poverty, about the fact that the state had taken their last cow or that their village was still without electricity. Censorship had eased—Stalin had been dead for two years—and one could write, for example, that in the village of Chodów there was a store but its shelves were always bare. While Stalin was alive, one could not write that a store was empty: all stores had to be excellently stocked, bursting with wares. So this was progress.

I rattled along from village to village, from town to town, in a hay cart or on a rickety bus—private cars were a rarity, and even a bicycle wasn't easy to come by. My route sometimes took me to a village along the border. But it happened infrequently, for the closer one got to the border the emptier the land became, and the fewer people one encountered. The emptiness only increased the mystery of those regions, a mystery that attracted and fascinated me. I wondered what one might experience upon crossing the border. What would one feel? What would one think? Would it be a moment of great emotion, agitation, tension? What was it like, on the other side? It would, of course, be . . . different. But what did "different" mean? What did the other side look like? Did it resemble anything I knew? Was it inconceivable, unimaginable? My greatest desire, which gave me no peace, which tormented and tantalized me, was actually quite modest: I wanted only one thing—to cross the border. To cross it and then to come right back—that would be entirely sufficient, would satisfy my inexplicable yet acute hunger.

But how to do this? None of my friends from school or university had ever been abroad. Anyone with a contact in another country generally preferred not to advertise it. I was sometimes angry with myself for my bizarre longing; still, it didn't abate for a moment.

One day, I encountered Irena Tarlowska, my editor-in-chief, in the hallway. She was a strapping, handsome woman with thick blond hair parted on one side. She said something about my recent stories, and then asked about my plans for the near future. I named the various villages I'd be visiting and the issues that awaited me there, and then mustered the courage to add, "One day, I would very much like to go abroad."

"Abroad?" she said, surprised and slightly frightened. "Where? What for?"

"I was thinking about Czechoslovakia," I answered. I wouldn't have dared to say Paris or London, and, frankly, those cities didn't interest me; I couldn't even imagine them. This was only about crossing the border—it made no difference which one, because what was important was not the destination but the mystical and transcendent act.

A year passed. Then one afternoon the telephone rang in the newsroom. The editor-in-chief was summoning me to her office. "We are sending you abroad," she said, as I stood before her desk. "You'll go to India."

My first reaction was astonishment. And, right after that, panic: I knew nothing about India. I feverishly searched my thoughts for some associations, images, names. Nothing. Zero. The idea for the India trip came from the fact that, several months earlier, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, had visited Poland—one of the first premiers of a non-Soviet-bloc country to do so. The first connections were being established. My stories were supposed to bring that distant land closer.

It was an old twin-engine DC-3, well worn from wartime forays along the front lines, with wings blackened by exhaust fumes and patches on its fuselage. But it flew, nearly empty, to Rome. I sat by the window, excitedly seeing the world from a bird's-eye view for the first time. Until then, I hadn't even been to the mountains. Multicolored chessboards slowly passed beneath us, gray-green tapestries stretched out on the ground to dry in the sun. But dusk came quickly, then darkness.

"It's evening," the man next to me said, in thickly accented Polish. He was an Italian journalist returning home, and I remember only that his name was Mario. When I told him where I was going and that this was my first trip abroad, he laughed, said something to the effect of "Don't worry," and promised to help. I was secretly overjoyed, because I was flying West and had been taught to fear the West like fire.

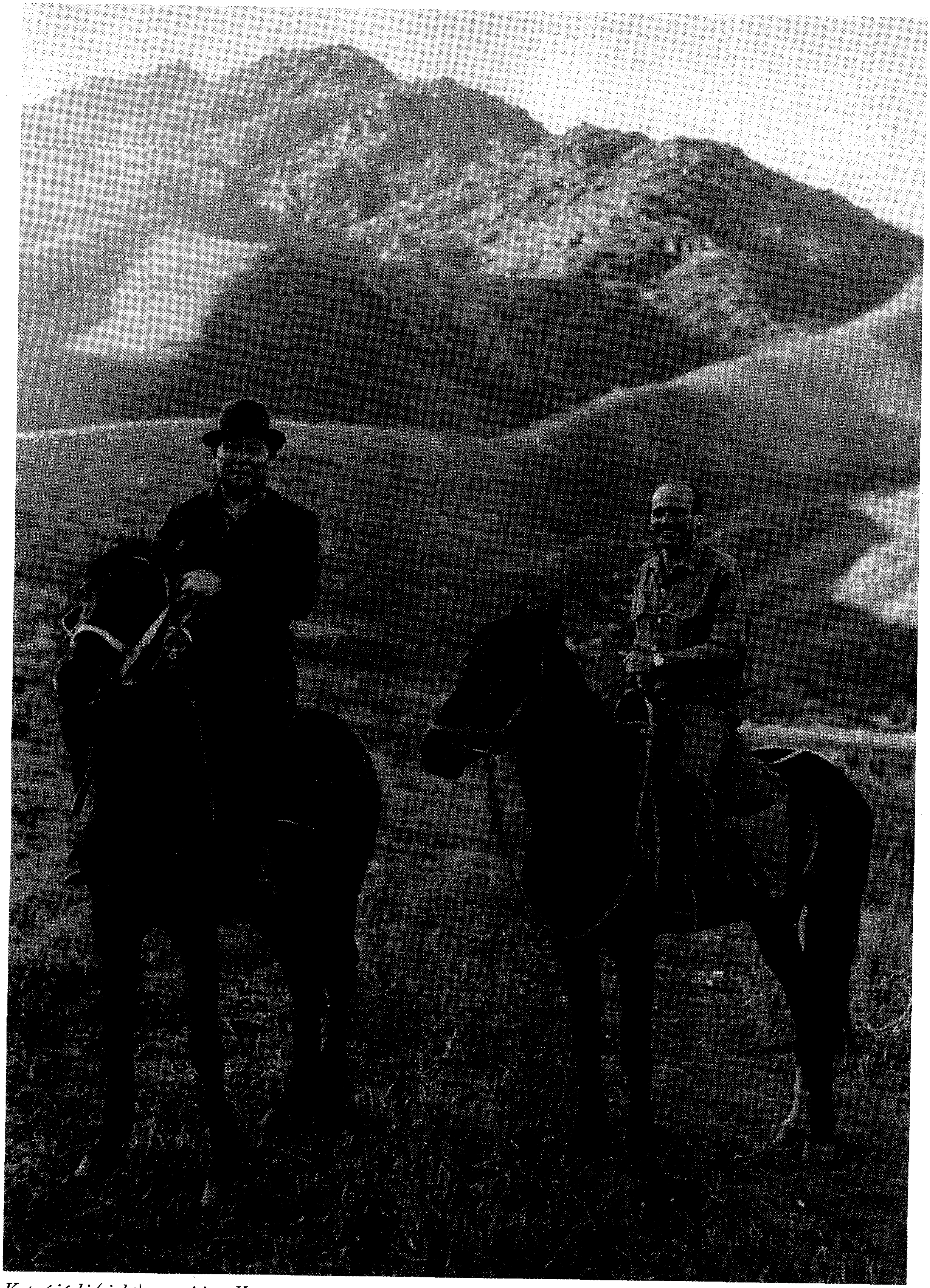
Suddenly, the tension that afflicts all parts of a plane when its engines are at full throttle started to ease, and the sound of the engines grew quieter and less urgent; we were approaching the end of our journey. Mario grabbed me by the arm and pointed out the window. "Look!"

I was dumbstruck.

The entire length and breadth of the blackness over which we had been flying was now filled with light. It was an intense light, blinding, quivering, flickering. I had the impression of a liquid substance, like molten lava, glimmering down below, a sparkling surface that pulsated with brightness, expanding and contracting. The entire shining apparition was alive, full of movement, vibration, energy.

It was the first time in my life that I

GAZETA/AGENCE VU



Kapuściński (right) on a visit to Kyrgyzstan, in 1967. Leaving Poland, "I wanted only one thing—to cross the border."

had seen an illuminated city. What few cities and towns I had known until then were depressingly dark. Shopwindows never shone, there were no colorful advertisements, the street lamps had weak bulbs. Who needed lights, anyway? In the evenings, the streets were deserted, and one encountered few cars.

As we descended, this landscape of lights drew nearer and assumed enormous proportions. Finally, the plane thumped against the tarmac, crunched and creaked. We had arrived. We drove into the city through crowded streets. Traffic, lights, and sounds—it all worked on me like a narcotic. I must have looked like a creature of the forest: stunned, fearful, wide-eyed, trying to take in, understand, distinguish things.

In the morning, I overheard a conversation in the adjoining room and recognized Mario's voice. I found out later that he was discussing how to dress me, since I had arrived sporting fashions à la Warsaw Pact, 1956. I had a suit of Cheviot in sharp, gray-blue stripes: a double-breasted jacket with protruding, angular shoulders, and overly long, wide trousers with large cuffs. I had a pale-yellow nylon shirt and a green plaid tie. Finally, the shoes—massive loafers with thick, stiff soles.

We started making the rounds of the shops, accompanied by Mario's wife. For me, these were expeditions of discovery. Three things dazzled me in particular. First, that the stores were brimming with merchandise, the goods weighing down shelves and counters, spilling out in colorful streams onto sidewalks, streets, and squares. Second, that the salesladies did not sit, but stood looking at the entrance; it was strange that they stood in silence, rather than sitting and talking to one another. The third shock was that they answered the questions you asked them. They responded in complete sentences and then added, *Grazie!* Mario's wife would ask about something and they would listen with sympathy and attention, inclining forward with such focus that it looked as if they were about to start a race.

In the evening, I felt brave enough to go out alone. I must have been staying somewhere in the center, because Stazione Termini was nearby, and from there I walked along Via Cavour, making my way to Piazza Venezia, and then back through little streets and alleys to Stazione Termini. I did not notice the architecture, the statues, the monuments; I was fascinated only by the cafés and bars. There were tables everywhere on the sidewalks, and people sat at them, drinking and talking, or simply looking at the street and the passersby. Behind tall, narrow counters barmen poured drinks, mixed cocktails, brewed coffee. Waiters bustled about, delivering glasses and cups with a magician's agility and bravura, the likes of which I had seen only once before, in a Soviet circus, when the performer conjured a wooden plate, a glass goblet, and a screeching rooster out of thin air.

One day, I spotted an empty table, sat down, and ordered a coffee. After a while, I became aware that people were looking at me. I had on a new suit, an Italian shirt white as snow, and a very fashionable polka-dotted tie, but there still must have been something in my appearance, in my way of sitting and moving, that gave me away. I sensed that I stuck out, and although I should have been happy, sitting there beneath the miraculous skies of Rome, I began to feel awkward and uncomfortable. I had changed my suit, but I could not conceal whatever lay beneath it. Here I was in the wide, wonderful world, and it was only serving to remind me how alien I felt.

A stewardess dressed in a pastel-colored sari was greeting passengers at the doors of the four-engine Air India International colossus. The subdued hues of her outfit suggested that a pleasant flight awaited us. Her hands were arranged as if in prayer—what I soon learned was a Hindu gesture of greeting. In the cabin was a strong and unfamiliar aroma, surely, I thought, the scent of some Eastern incense, Hindu herbs, fruits, and resins.

We flew by night, only a small green

light twinkling at the tip of the wing visible through the window. This was before the population explosion, when air travel was still comfortable, with planes often carrying only a few passengers. Passengers slept stretched out across several seats.

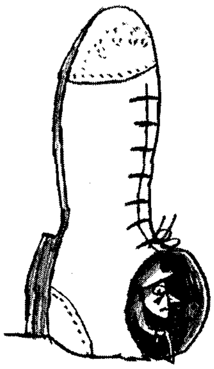
The night ended and day came. Looking through the little window, I was able to gaze for the first time on an enormous expanse of our planet. The world I had known until then was perhaps five hundred kilometres in length and four hundred in width. And here we were, flying forever, it seemed, while the earth, very far below, kept changing colors—burned brown, then green, and then, for a long while, dark blue.

It was late evening when we landed in New Delhi. I was instantly awash in heat and humidity, and stood dripping with sweat. The people with whom I had been flying suddenly vanished, swept away by the animated crowd of friends and relatives who had been waiting for them.

I was left alone and had no idea what to do. The airport building was small and deserted, a far cry from Rome's. It stood all by itself, cloaked in night, and I had no idea what lay beyond it. After a while, an old man in a loose white knee-length garment appeared. He had a gray beard and wore an orange turban. He said something I didn't understand, although I assume that he was asking why I was standing there alone, in the middle of an empty airport. I didn't know what to say. I was quite unprepared for this journey—I had no names or addresses in my notebook. My English was poor. I'd wanted to achieve the unachievable—to cross the border—but by expressing that wish I'd started a chain of events that had deposited me on the far side of the world.

The old man thought for a while, then motioned with his hand for me to follow him. A scratched-up, dilapidated bus was parked by the airport entrance. We got in, the old man started the engine, and we set off. We had covered only a few hundred metres when the driver slowed down and began honking loudly. Before us, where the road should have been, I saw a broad white river vanishing somewhere into the thick blackness of the sultry night. The river was made up of people sleeping out in the open, some on wooden plank beds, others on mats and blankets, but most of them directly on the bare asphalt or on the sandy banks on either side.

I thought that the crowds, awakened by the roar of the horn sounding directly over their heads, would fall upon us in a rage. Far from it! As we inched forward, people rose one by one and moved aside, taking with them children and old women barely able to walk. In their ardent compliance, in their submissive humility, there was something apologetic, as if sleeping here on the road were some crime whose traces they were quickly trying to erase. Like this, we made our way toward the city, the horn blaring, people stirring and giving way—on and on and on.

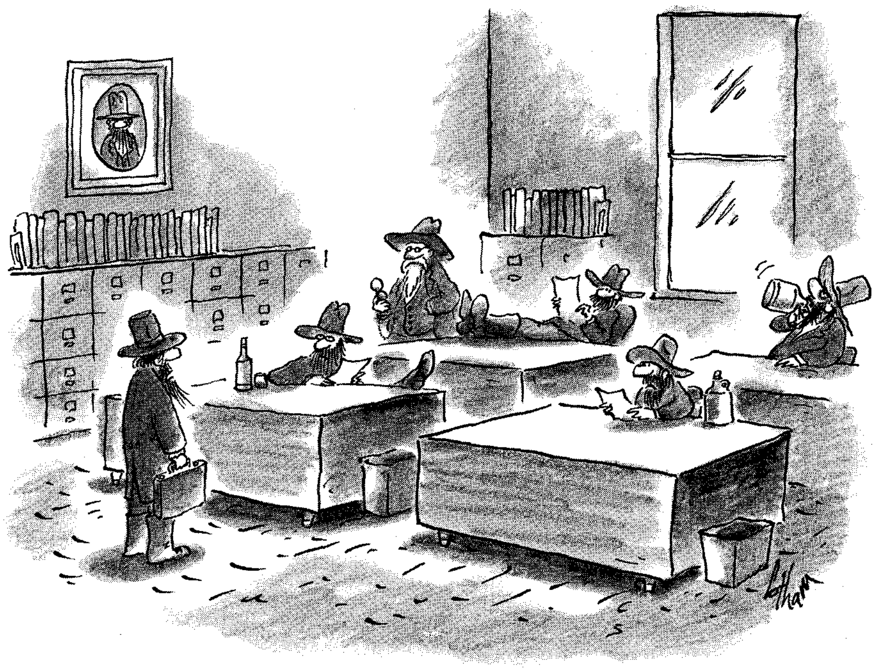


We arrived at a place illuminated by a red neon sign: "HOTEL." The driver left me at the reception desk and disappeared without a word. The man at the desk, this one sporting a blue turban, led me upstairs to a little room furnished with only a bed, a table, and a washstand. Without a word he pulled off the bedsheet, sending some panicked bugs scurrying; he shook them off onto the floor, muttered something by way of good night, and departed.

Left alone, I sat down on the bed and considered my situation. On the negative side, I didn't know where I was. On the positive, I had a roof over my head; an institution (a hotel) had given me shelter. Did I feel safe? Yes. Uncomfortable? No. Strange? Yes. I could not define precisely wherein lay this strangeness, but the sensation grew stronger in the morning, when a barefoot man entered the room bearing a pot of tea and several biscuits. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. He placed the tray on the table, bowed, and, having uttered not a word, softly withdrew. There was such a natural politeness in his manner, such profound tactfulness, that I felt instant admiration and respect for him.

Something more disconcerting occurred an hour later, when I stepped out of the hotel. Across the street, on a cramped little square, rickshaw drivers had been gathering since dawn—skinny, stooped men with bony, sinewy legs. They must have learned that a sahib had arrived at the hotel. A sahib, by definition, must have money, so they waited patiently, ready to serve. But the very idea of sprawling comfortably in a rickshaw pulled by a hungry waif of a man filled me with revulsion, outrage, horror. To be an exploiter? A bloodsucker? To oppress another human being in that way? Never! I had been brought up in precisely the opposite spirit, taught that even living skeletons such as these were my brothers, kindred souls, near ones, flesh of my flesh. So when the rickshaw drivers threw themselves upon me with pleading encouragement, clamoring and fighting among themselves for my business, I began to push them away firmly, rebuke them, protest. They were astounded—what was I saying, what was I doing? They had been counting on me, after all. I was their only chance, their only hope. I walked on without turning my head, impassive, resolute, smugly proud of not having allowed myself to be manipulated into assuming the role of a leech.

Old Delhi! Its narrow, dusty, fiendishly hot streets, with their stifling odor of tropical fermentation. And this crowd of silently moving people, appearing and disappearing, their faces dark, humid, anonymous, closed. Quiet children, making no sound. A man stared dully at the remains of his bicycle, which had fallen apart in the middle of the street. A woman sold something wrapped in green leaves—what was it? A beggar demonstrated how the skin of his stomach was plastered to his spinal cord—but was this even possible? One had to walk carefully, to pay attention, because many venders spread their wares directly on the ground, on the sidewalks, right on the edge of the road. Here was a man who had laid out two rows of human teeth and some old pliers on a piece of newspaper, thereby advertising his dental services. His neighbor—a wizened, shrunken fellow—was hawking books. I rummaged through the carelessly piled, dusty volumes and settled on two: Hemingway's "For Whom the Bell Tolls" (useful for learn-



"Sorry I'm late—my mule balked."

• •

ing English) and Abbé J. A. Dubois's "Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies." Father Dubois arrived in India as a missionary in 1792 and stayed for thirty-one years, and this book was the fruit of his studies of the Hindu way of life.

I returned to the hotel and opened the Hemingway, to the first sentence: "He lay flat on the brown, pine-needled floor of the forest, his chin on his folded arms, and high overhead the wind blew in the tops of the pine trees." I understood nothing. I had a small English-Polish pocket dictionary, the only one available in Warsaw. I managed to find the word "brown," but none of the others. I proceeded to the next sentence: "The mountainside sloped gently." Again—not a word. "There was a stream alongside." The more I tried to understand this text, the more discouraged I became. I felt trapped. Besieged by language. Language struck me at that moment as something material, something with a physical dimension, a wall rising up in the middle of the road and blocking my way, closing off the world, making it unattainable. It was an unpleasant and humiliating sensation.

I might have fled India and returned home, if not for the fact that I had bought a return ticket on the passenger ship Batory, which in those days sailed between Gdansk and Bombay. President Gamal Nasser of Egypt had just nationalized the Suez Canal, and England and France had responded with armed intervention; as war broke out, the canal was blocked, and the Batory was stuck somewhere on the Mediterranean. I was cut off from home, condemned to India.

Cast into deep water, I didn't want to drown. I realized that only language could save me. I began cramming words, night and day. I placed a cold towel on my temples, feeling as if my head were bursting. I was never without the Hemingway, but now I skipped the descriptive passages, which I couldn't understand, and read the dialogue:

> "How many are you?" Robert Jordan asked.
>
> "We are seven and there are two women."
>
> "Two?"
>
> "Yes."

I understood all of that! And this, too:

> "Augustín is a very good man," Anselmo said.
>
> "You know him well?"
>
> "Yes. For a long time."

I walked around the city, copying down signs, the names of goods in stores, words overheard at bus stops. In movie theatres, I scribbled blindly, in darkness, the words on the screen; I noted the slogans on banners carried by demonstrators in the streets. I approached India not through images, sounds, and smells but through words; and not the words of the indigenous Hindi but those of a foreign, imposed tongue, which by then had so fully taken root there that it was for me an indispensable key to the country.

During all those days after my arrival in Delhi, I was tormented by the thought that I was not working as a reporter, that I was not gathering material for the stories that I would later have to write. I hadn't come as a tourist, after all. I was an envoy, engaged to render an account, to transmit, relate. But I found myself empty-handed, at a loss even how to begin. I knew nothing about India, but the Suez war had made returning home impossible, so I could only move forward. I decided to travel.

The receptionists in my hotel advised me to go to Benares. "Sacred town!" they explained. I arrived in the late evening. The city seemed to have no outskirts; the bus emerged all of a sudden out of the dark and empty night into the brightly lit, noisy city center. After getting off the bus, I went for a walk. I reached the edge of Benares. On one side, in the darkness, lay the still, uninhabited fields, and on the other rose the city, densely peopled, throbbing with loud music.

The locals advised me not to go to sleep that night, so that I could get to the banks of the Ganges while it was still dark and, on the stone steps that stretch along the river, await the dawn. "The sunrise is very important!" they said, their voices resounding with the promise of something truly magnificent.

Already people had begun converging on the river. Singly and in groups. Entire clans. Columns of pilgrims. The lame on crutches. Aged virtual skeletons, some carried on the backs of the young, others—twisted, exhausted—crawling with great difficulty on their own along the asphalt. Cows and goats trailed beside the people, as did packs of bony, malarial dogs. I, too, joined this strange procession.

Dawn had barely touched the sky, and thousands of the faithful had gathered. Some were animated, pushing their way through. Others sat in the lotus position, stretching their arms up toward the heavens. The bottom stairs were occupied by those performing the purification ritual—wading into the river and now and then submerging themselves completely. I saw a family subjecting a stout grandmother to this rite. The grandmother didn't know how to swim and sank at once to the bottom. The family rushed in and brought her back up to the surface. The grandmother gulped as much air as she could, but, the instant they let her go, she went under again. I could see her bulging eyes, her terrified face. She sank once more, they searched for her again in the murky waters, and again they pulled her out, barely alive. The whole ritual looked like torture, but she endured it without protest, perhaps even in ecstasy.

On the opposite bank of the Ganges stretched rows of wood pyres, on which hundreds of corpses were burning. For a few rupees, the curious could take a boat over to this gigantic open-air crematorium. Half-naked, soot-covered men bustled about, as did many young boys. With long poles they adjusted the pyres to direct a better draft so that the cremation could proceed faster. The line of corpses had no end; the wait was long. The still glowing ashes were raked and pushed into the river. The gray dust floated atop the waves for a while but soon, saturated with water, sank and vanished.

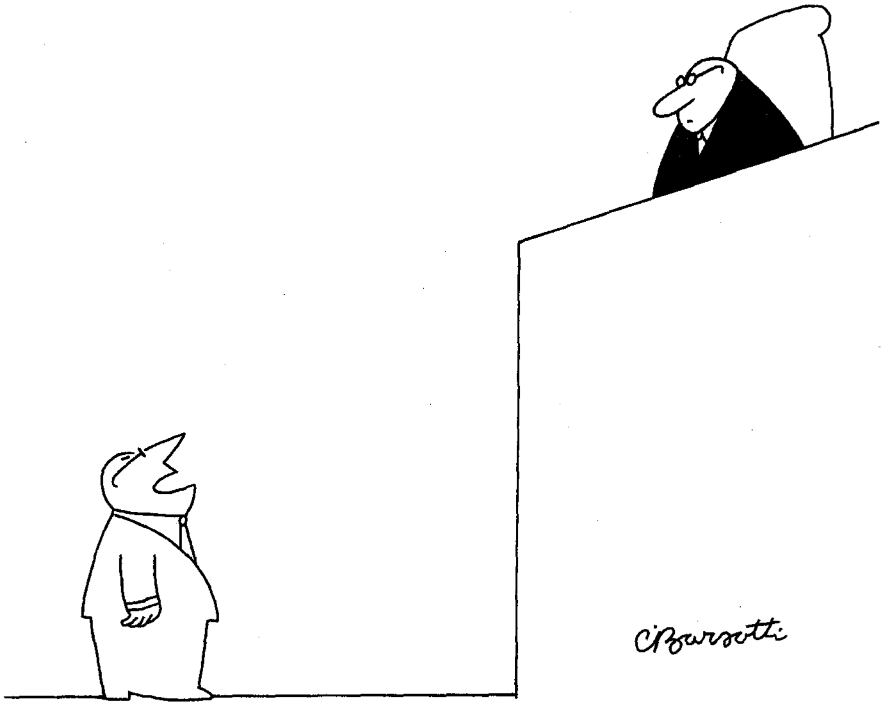
I passed a sleepless night on the train to Calcutta, for those old cars, dating back to colonial times, shook, hurled you about, rumbled. You were even pelted with rain, coming in through windows that could not be shut. It was a gray, overcast day by the time we pulled in to Sealdah Station. On every square inch of the enormous terminal, on its long platforms, its dead-end tracks, the swampy fields nearby, sat or lay tens of thousands of emaciated people, under streams of rain, in the water and the mud. It was the rainy season, and the heavy tropical downpour did not abate for a moment. I was struck at once by the poverty of these soaked skeletons, their untold numbers, and, perhaps most of all, their immobility. They seemed a lifeless component of the dismal landscape, whose sole kinetic element was the sheets of water pouring from the sky.

Some of these people were refugees from the war between Hindus and Muslims that had ended a few years earlier—a war that saw the birth of independent India and Pakistan, and resulted in hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of deaths and many millions of refugees. The refugees wandered about for a long time, unable to find succor, and, left to their fate, vegetated for a while in places like Sealdah Station, before eventually dying of hunger or disease. But there was more to this scene. These columns of postwar vagabonds encountered throngs of others along the way—the legions of flood victims evicted from villages and small towns by the waters of India's powerful rivers. And so millions of homeless, indifferent people shuffled along the roads, hoping to reach the cities, to get a sip of water there and perhaps a handful of rice.

Just climbing out of the train car was difficult—there was no room for me to place my foot on the platform. An old woman next to me was digging some rice out of the folds of her sari. She poured it into a little bowl and started to look around, perhaps for water, perhaps for fire, so that she could boil the rice. I noticed several children near her, eying the bowl. Staring—motionless, wordless. The children did not throw themselves on the rice; the rice was the property of the old woman, and these children had been inculcated with something more powerful than hunger.

A man was pushing his way through the huddled multitudes. He jostled the old woman, the bowl dropped from her hands, and the rice scattered onto the platform, into the mud, amid the garbage. In that split second, the children threw themselves down, diving between the legs of those still standing, digging around in the muck, trying to find the grains of rice. The old woman stood there empty-handed; another man shoved her. The old woman, the children, the train station, everything—soaked through by the unending torrents of a tropical downpour. And I, too, stood dripping wet, afraid to take a step; and, anyway, I didn't know where to go.

From Calcutta I travelled south, to Hyderabad. The south was very different from the north and all its sufferings. The south seemed cheerful, calm, sleepy, and a little provincial. The servants of a local raja must have confused me with someone else, because they greeted me ceremoniously



"I demand a change of venue to the private sector."

at the station and drove me straight to a palace. A polite elderly man welcomed me, and sat me down in a wide leather armchair, surely counting on a longer and deeper conversation than my primitive English would allow. I stuttered something or other, and felt myself turning red. Sweat poured down my forehead. The elderly man smiled kindly, which set me more at ease. It was all rather dreamlike. The servants led me to a room in one of the palace wings. As the guest of the raja, I was to stay here. I wanted to call the whole thing off, but didn't know how—I lacked the words with which to explain that there had been some misunderstanding. Perhaps just the fact of my being from Europe conferred some prestige on the palace? I don't know.

The raja's palace—all glassed-in verandas, maybe a hundred of them, which, when the panes were opened, allowed a light and bracing breeze to waft through the rooms—was surrounded by lush, well-tended gardens, in which gardeners were constantly pruning, mowing, and raking. Farther on, beyond a high wall, the city began. There one walked along little streets and alleyways, narrow and always crowded, passing countless colorful stalls selling food, clothing, shoes, cleaning products. Even when it wasn't raining, the streets were muddy, because all waste got poured into the middle—the streets belonged to no one.

The raja's palace was full of servants. I saw no one else, really, and it was as if the entire estate had been given over to their rule. Butlers, footmen, waiters, maids, and valets, specialists in brewing tea and frosting cakes, clothes pressers and messengers, exterminators of mosquitoes and spiders, and many more whose duties and roles it was impossible to fathom, passed continually through the bedrooms and living rooms, along the corridors and up the stairs, dusting rugs and furniture, beating pillows, arranging armchairs, cutting and watering the flowers. All of them moved about in silence, fluidly, cautiously, giving a slightly fearful impression. But there was no visible nervousness, no running about or gesticulating. It was as if a Bengal tiger were circling around somewhere; one's only chance of safety was to make no sudden movements. Even during the day, in the glare of the sun, the servants resembled anonymous shadows, moving about without speaking, careful not to meet anyone's gaze.

OF LOVE AND OTHER DISASTERS

The punch-press operator from Flint
met the assembler from West Virginia
in a bar near the stadium. Neither
had anything in mind, so they conversed
about the upcoming baseball season
about which neither cared. We could
be a couple, he thought, but she was
all wrong, way too skinny. For years
he'd had an image of the way a woman
should look, and it wasn't her, it wasn't
anyone he'd ever known, certainly not
his ex-wife, who'd moved back south
to live with her high-school sweetheart.
About killed him. I don't need that shit,
he almost said aloud, and then realized
she'd been talking to someone, maybe
to him, about how she couldn't get
her hands right, how the grease ate
so deeply into her skin it became
a part of her, and she put her hand,
palm up, on the bar and pointed

They were variously dressed, according to function and rank: from golden turbans pinned with precious stones to simple dhoti—bands worn around the hips by those at the bottom of the hierarchy. Some were attired in silks, embroidered belts, and glittering epaulettes, while others wore ordinary shirts and white caftans. They had one thing in common—all were barefoot. Even if they were adorned with embroideries and tassels, brocades and cashmeres, they had nothing on their feet.

I noticed this detail right away, because I have a thing about shoes. It started in 1942, during the war, and the German occupation. Winter was approaching, and I had no shoes. My old ones had fallen apart, and my mother didn't have money for a new pair. The shoes available to Poles cost four hundred zloty. They had tops made of thick denim coated with a black, water-repellent paste and soles made of pale linden wood. Where could one get four hundred zloty?

We were living in Warsaw then, on Krochmalna Street, near the gate to the ghetto, in the apartment of the Skupiewskis. Mr. Skupiewski had a cottage industry making bars of green bathroom soap. "I will give you some bars on consignment," he told me. "When you sell enough, you can buy your shoes. And you can pay me back after the war." People still believed then that the war would end soon. He advised me to work along the route of the Warsaw-Otwock railway line, frequented by holiday travellers; vacationers will want to pamper themselves a little, he counselled. I listened to him. I was ten years old, and I cried half the tears of a lifetime then, because in fact no one ever wanted to buy the little soaps. In a whole day of walking I would sell none—or maybe a single bar. Once I sold three and returned home bright red with happiness.

Winter weather arrived, the cold nipped at the soles of my feet, and because of the pain I had to stop selling. I had three hundred zloty, but Mr. Skupiewski generously threw in another hundred. I went with my mother to buy the shoes. If one wrapped one's

with her cigarette at the deep lines
the work had carved. "The life line,"
he said, "which one is that?" "None,"
she said, and he noticed that her eyes
were hazel flecked with tiny spots
of gold, and then—embarrassed—looked
back at her hand, which seemed tiny
and delicate, the fingers yellowed
with calluses but slender and fine.
She took a paper napkin off the bar,
spit on it and told him to hold still
while she carefully lifted his glasses
up on his forehead, leaving him half
blind, and wiped something off
above his left cheekbone. "There,"
she said, lowering his glasses, "I
got it," and even with his glasses on
what she showed him was nothing
he could see. He thought, better
get out of here before it's too late, but
knew too late was what he wanted.

—*Philip Levine*

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legs in flannel and tied newspaper on top of that, one could wear the shoes even in the worst winter freezes.

I received a return ticket from Delhi to Warsaw via Kabul and Moscow. I landed in Kabul just as the sun was setting. An intensely pink, almost violet sky cast its last light onto the navy-blue mountains surrounding the valley. The day was dying, sinking into a total and profound silence—it was the hush of a landscape, a region, a world that could be disturbed neither by the bell on a donkey's neck nor by the fine patter of a flock of sheep passing the airport.

I had no visa, and the police detained me. But they could not send me back, because the plane I'd arrived on had already left and there were no other aircraft on the runway. They conferred among themselves before driving off to town. I remained with the airport guard. He was an enormous, broad-shouldered fellow with a coal-black beard, gentle eyes, and a shy, uncertain smile. He wore a long military coat and carried a Mauser rifle.

Night descended suddenly, and at once it grew cold. I was trembling; I had flown here straight from the tropics and wore only a shirt. The guard brought some wood, kindling, and dry grasses and started a fire on a slab of concrete. He gave me his coat and wrapped himself up to the eyes in a dark camel-hair blanket. We sat facing one another without uttering a word. Nothing was happening around us. Some crickets awoke in the distance, and later, even farther away, a car engine growled.

In the morning, the policemen returned with an elderly man named Mr. Bielas, a merchant who bought cotton in Kabul for the factories in Lódz. Mr. Bielas promised to see about a visa; he'd been here for some time already, and had connections. Indeed, he not only secured a visa but invited me to his villa, pleased to have some company for a while.

Kabul was dust upon dust. Winds blew through the valley where the city lay, carrying clouds of sand from the nearby deserts. A brownish-gray particulate matter hung in the air, coating everything, pushing its way in everywhere, settling only when the winds died down. And then the air grew transparent, crystal clear. Every evening, the streets looked as if an improvised mystery play were being staged on them. The all-pervasive darkness was pierced only by oil lamps and torches burning on the street stalls, feeble flames illuminating the meagre goods laid out by venders on patches of road, or on the thresholds of houses. Between these rows of lights people passed silently—hunched, covered figures whipped by the cold and the wind.

When the plane from Moscow started to descend over Warsaw, my neighbor trembled, squeezed the arms of his seat with both hands, and closed his eyes. He had a gray, ravaged face, covered with wrinkles. A musty, cheap suit hung loosely on his bony frame. I looked at him furtively, out of the corner of my eye. Tears were flowing down his cheeks. And a moment later I heard a suppressed but nevertheless distinct sob.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry. But I didn't believe that I would return."

It was December, 1956. People were still coming out of the gulags.

India was my first encounter with otherness, the discovery of a new world. It was at the same time a great lesson in humility. I returned from that journey embarrassed by my own ignorance. I realized then what seems obvious now: another culture would not reveal its mysteries to me at a mere wave of my hand. One has to prepare oneself thoroughly for such an encounter.

My initial reaction to this lesson was to run home, to return to places I knew, to my own language, to the world of already familiar signs and symbols. I tried to forget India, which signified to me my failure: its enormousness and diversity, its poverty and riches, its incomprehensibility had crushed, stunned, and finally defeated me. Once again, I was glad to travel around Poland, to write about its people, to talk to them, to listen to what they had to say. We understood each other instantly, were united by common experience.

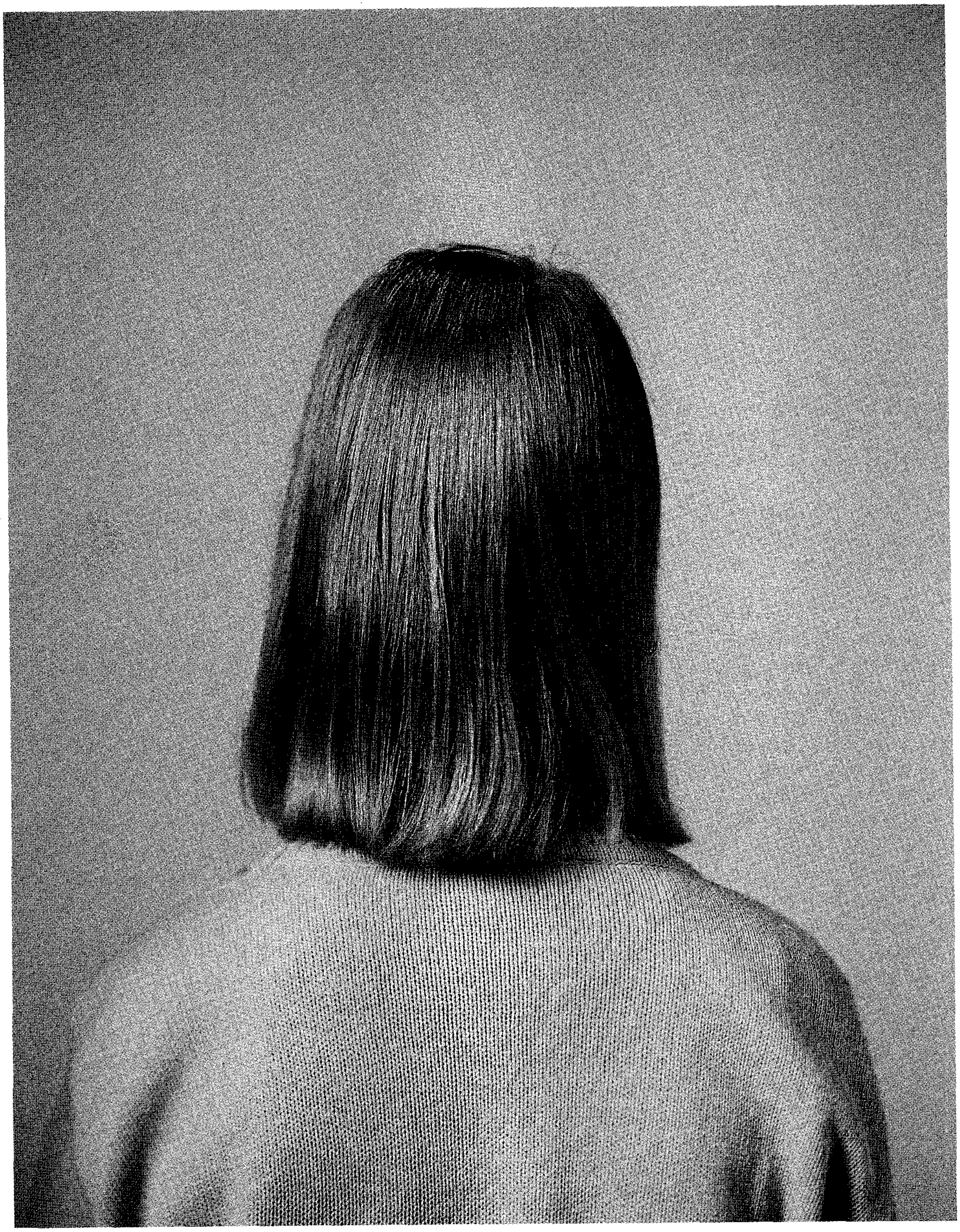
But of course I remembered India. The more bitter the cold of the Polish winter, the more readily I thought of hot Kerala; the quicker darkness fell, the more vividly images of Kashmir's dazzling sunrises resurfaced. The world was no longer uniformly cold and snowy but had multiplied, become variegated: it was simultaneously cold and hot, snowy white but also green and blooming. ♦

(*Translated, from the Polish, by Klara Glowczewska.*)

FICTION

GOOD PEOPLE

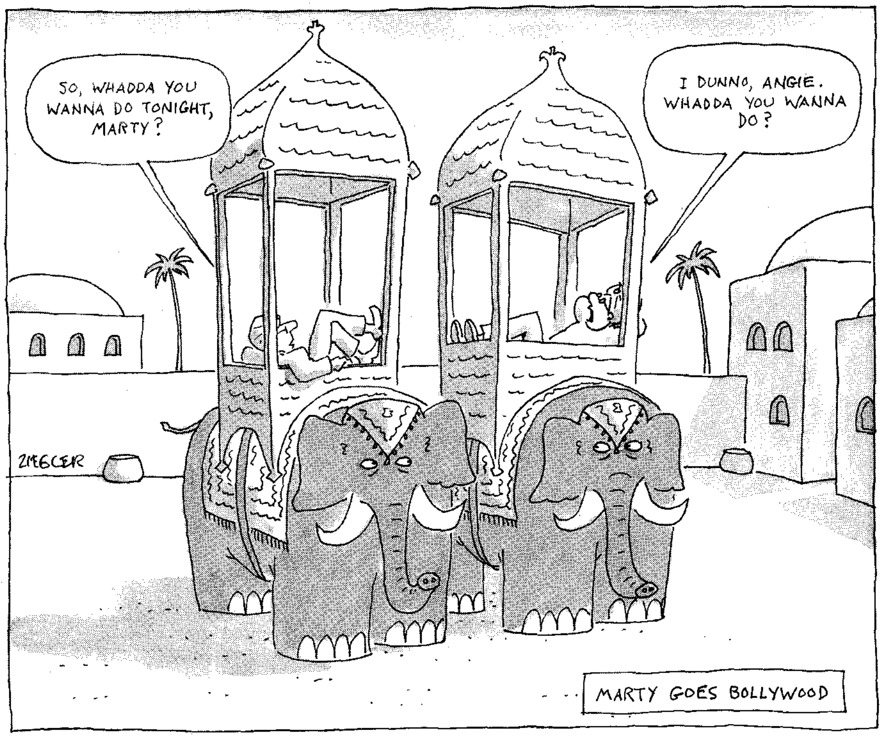
BY DAVID FOSTER WALLACE



They were up on a picnic table at that park by the lake, by the edge of the lake, with part of a downed tree in the shallows half hidden by the bank. Lane A. Dean, Jr., and his girlfriend, both in bluejeans and button-up shirts. They sat up on the table's top portion and had their shoes on the bench part that people sat on to picnic or fellowship together in carefree times. They'd gone to different high schools but the same junior college, where they had met in campus ministries. It was springtime, and the park's grass was very green and the air suffused with honeysuckle and lilacs both, which was almost too much. There were bees, and the angle of the sun made the water of the shallows look dark. There had been more storms that week, with some downed trees and the sound of chainsaws all up and down his parents' street. Their postures on the picnic table were both the same forward kind with their shoulders rounded and elbows on their knees. In this position the girl rocked slightly and once put her face in her hands, but she was not crying. Lane was very still and immobile and looking past the bank at the downed tree in the shallows and its ball of exposed roots going all directions and the tree's cloud of branches all half in the water. The only other individual nearby was a dozen spaced tables away, by himself, standing upright. Looking at the torn-up hole in the ground there where the tree had gone over. It was still early yet and all the shadows wheeling right and shortening. The girl wore a thin old checked cotton shirt with pearl-colored snaps with the long sleeves down and always smelled very good and clean, like someone you could trust and care about even if you weren't in love. Lane Dean had liked the smell of her right away. His mother called her *down to earth* and liked her, thought she was good people, you could tell—she made this evident in little ways. The shallows lapped from different directions at the tree as if almost teething on it. Sometimes when alone and thinking or struggling to turn a matter over to Jesus Christ in prayer, he would find himself putting his fist in his palm and turning it slightly as if still playing and pounding his glove to stay sharp and alert in center. He did not do this now; it would be cruel and indecent to do this now. The older individual stood beside his picnic table—he was at it but not sitting—and looked also out of place in a suit coat or jacket and the kind of men's hat Lane's grandfather wore in photos as a young insurance man. He appeared to be looking across the lake. If he moved, Lane didn't see it. He looked more like a picture than a man. There were not any ducks in view.

One thing Lane Dean did was reassure her again that he'd go with her and be there with her. It was one of the few safe or decent things he could really say. The second time he said it again now she shook her head and laughed in an unhappy way that was more just air out her nose. Her real laugh was different. Where he'd be was the waiting room, she said. That he'd be thinking about her and feeling bad for her, she knew, but he couldn't be in there with her. This was so obviously true that he felt like a ninny that he'd kept on about it and now knew what she had thought every time he went and said it—it hadn't brought her comfort or eased the burden at all. The worse he felt, the stiller he sat. The whole thing felt balanced on a knife or wire; if he moved to put his arm up or touch her the whole thing could tip over. He hated himself for sitting so frozen. He could almost visualize himself tiptoeing past something explosive. A big stupid-looking tiptoe, like in a cartoon. The whole last black week had been this way and it was wrong. He knew it was wrong, knew something was required of him that was not this terrible frozen care and caution, but he pretended to himself he did not know what it was that was required. He pretended it had no name. He pretended that not saying aloud what he knew to be right and true was for her sake, was for the sake of her needs and feelings. He also worked dock and routing at UPS, on top of school, but had traded to get the day off after they'd decided together. Two days before, he had awakened very early and tried to pray but could not. He was freezing more and more solid, he felt like, but he had not thought of his father or the blank frozenness of his father, even in church, which had once filled him with such pity. This was the truth. Lane Dean, Jr., felt sun on one arm as he pictured in his mind an image of himself on a train, waving mechanically to something that got smaller and smaller as the train pulled away. His father and his mother's father had the same birthday, a Cancer. Sheri's hair was colored an almost corn blond, very clean, the skin through her central part pink in the sunlight. They'd sat here long enough that only their right side was shaded now. He could look at her head, but not at her. Different parts of him felt unconnected to each other. She was smarter than him and they both knew it. It wasn't just school—Lane Dean was in accounting and business and did all right; he was hanging in there. She was a year older, twenty, but it was also more—she had always seemed to Lane to be on good terms with her life in a way that age could not account for. His mother had put it that she *knew what it is she wanted*, which was nursing and not an easy program at Peoria Junior College, and plus she worked hostessing at the Embers and had bought her own car. She was serious in a way Lane liked. She had a cousin that died when she was thirteen, fourteen, that she'd loved and been close with. She only talked about it that once. He liked her smell and her downy arms and the way she exclaimed when something made her laugh. He had liked just being with her and talking to her. She was serious in her faith and values in a way that Lane had liked and now, sitting here with her on the table, found himself afraid of. This was an awful thing. He was starting to believe that he might not be serious in his faith. He might be somewhat of a hypocrite, like the Assyrians in Isaiah, which would be a far graver sin than the appointment—he had decided he believed this. He was desperate to be good people, to still be able to feel he was good. He rarely before now had thought of damnation and Hell—that part of it didn't speak to his spirit—and in worship services he more just tuned himself out and tolerated Hell when it came up, the same way you tolerate the job you've got to have to save up for what it is you want. Her tennis shoes had little things doodled on them from sitting in her class lectures. She stayed looking down like that. Little notes or reading assignments in Bic in her neat round hand on the rubber elements around the sneaker's rim. Lane A. Dean, looking now at her inclined head's side's barrettes in the shape of blue ladybugs. The appointment was for afternoon, but when the doorbell had rung so early and his mother'd called to him up the stairs, he had known, and a terrible

MARIAANA KELLA, "GIRL IN A PINK CARDIGAN" (1997)/VAN ZOETENDAAL COLLECTIONS, AMSTERDAM


SO, WHADDA YOU WANNA DO TONIGHT, MARTY?
I DUNNO, ANGIE. WHADDA YOU WANNA DO?
ZIEGLER
MARTY GOES BOLLYWOOD

kind of blankness had commenced falling through him.

He told her that he did not know what to do. That he knew if he was the salesman of it and forced it upon her that was awful and wrong. But he was trying to understand—they'd prayed on it and talked it through from every different angle. Lane said how sorry she knew he was, and that if he was wrong in believing they'd truly decided together when they decided to make the appointment she should please tell him, because he thought he knew how she must have felt as it got closer and closer and how she must be so scared, but that what he couldn't tell was if it was more than that. He was totally still except for moving his mouth, it felt like. She did not reply. That if they needed to pray on it more and talk it through, then he was here, he was ready, he said. The appointment could get moved back; if she just said the word they could call and push it back to take more time to be sure in the decision. It was still so early in it—they both knew that, he said. This was true, that he felt this way, and yet he also knew he was also trying to say things that would get her to open up and say enough back that he could see her and read her heart and know what to say to get her to go through with it. He knew this without admitting to himself that this was what he wanted, for it would make him a hypocrite and liar. He knew, in some locked-up little part of him, why it was that he'd gone to no one to open up and seek their life counsel, not Pastor Steve or the prayer partners at campus ministries, not his UPS friends or the spiritual counselling available through his parents' old church. But he did not know why Sheri herself had not gone to Pastor Steve—he could not read her heart. She was blank and hidden. He so fervently wished it never happened. He felt like he knew now why it was a true sin and not just a leftover rule from past society. He felt like he had been brought low by it and humbled and now did believe that the rules were there for a reason. That the rules were concerned with him personally, as an individual. He promised God he had learned his lesson. But what if that, too, was a hollow promise, from a hypocrite who repented only after, who promised submission but really only wanted a reprieve? He might not even know his own heart or be able to read and know himself. He kept thinking also of 1 Timothy and the hypocrite therein who *disputeth over words*. He felt a terrible inner resistance but could not feel what it was that it resisted. This was the truth. All the different angles and ways they had come at the decision together did not ever include it—the word—for had he once said it, avowed that he did love her, loved Sheri Fisher, then it all would have been transformed. It would not be a different stance or angle, but a difference in the very thing they were praying and deciding on together. Sometimes they had prayed together over the phone, in a kind of half code in case anybody accidentally picked up the extension. She continued to sit as if thinking, in the pose of thinking, like that one statue. They were right up next to each other on the table. He was looking over past her at the tree in the water. But he could not say he did: it was not true.

But neither did he ever open up and tell her straight out he did not love her. This might be his *lie by omission*. This might be the frozen resistance—were he to look right at her and tell her he didn't, she would keep the appointment and go. He knew this. Something in him, though, some terrible weakness or lack of values, could not tell her. It felt like a muscle he did not have. He didn't know why; he just could not do it, or even pray to do it. She believed he was good, serious in his values. Part of him seemed willing to more or less just about lie to someone with that kind of faith and trust, and what did that make him? How could such a type of individual even pray? What it really felt like was a taste of the reality of what might be meant by Hell. Lane Dean had never believed in Hell as a lake of fire or a loving God consigning folks to a burning lake of fire—he knew in his heart this was not true. What he believed in was a living God of compassion and love and the possibility of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through whom this love was enacted in human time. But sitting here beside this girl as unknown to him now as outer space, waiting for whatever she might say to unfreeze him, now he felt like he could see the edge or outline of what a real vision of Hell might be. It was of two great and terrible armies within himself, opposed and facing each other, silent. There would be battle but no victor. Or never a battle—the armies would stay like that, motionless, looking across at each other, and seeing therein something so different and alien from themselves that they could not understand, could not hear each other's speech as even words or read anything from what their face looked like, frozen like that, opposed and uncomprehending, for all human time. Two-hearted, a hypocrite to yourself either way.

When he moved his head, a part of the lake further out flashed with sun—the water up close wasn't black now, and you could see into the shallows and see that all the water was moving but gently, this way and that—and in this same way he besought to return to himself as Sheri moved her leg and started to turn beside him. He could see the man in the suit and gray hat standing motionless now at the lake's rim, holding something under one arm and looking across at the opposite side where a row of little forms on camp chairs sat in a way that meant they had lines in the water for crappie—which mostly only your blacks from the East Side ever did—and the little white shape at the row's end a Styrofoam creel. In his moment or time at the lake now just to come, Lane Dean first felt he could take this all in whole: everything seemed distinctly lit, for the circle of the pin oak's shade had rotated off all the way, and they sat now in sun with their shadow a two-headed thing in the grass before them. He was looking or gazing again at where the downed tree's branches seemed to all bend so sharply just under the shallows' surface when he was given to know that through all this frozen silence he'd despised he had, in truth, been praying, or some little part of his heart he could not hear had, for he was answered now with a type of vision, what he would later call within his own mind a vision or *moment of grace*. He was not a hypocrite, just broken and split off like all men. Later on, he believed that what happened was he'd had a moment of almost seeing them both as Jesus saw them—as blind but groping, wanting to please God despite their inborn fallen nature. For in that same given moment he saw, quick as light, into Sheri's heart, and was made to know what would occur here as she finished turning to him and the man in the hat watched the fishing and the downed elm shed cells into the water. This down-to-earth girl that smelled good and wanted to be a nurse would take and hold one of his hands in both of hers to unfreeze him and make him look at her, and she would say that she cannot do it. That she is sorry she did not know this sooner, that she hadn't meant to lie—she agreed because she'd wanted to believe that she could, but she cannot. That she will carry this and have it; she has to. With her gaze clear and steady. That all night last night she prayed and searched inside herself and decided this is what love commands of her. That Lane should please please sweetie let her finish. That listen—this is her own decision and obliges him to nothing. That she knows he does not love her, not that way, has known it all this time, and that it's all right. That it is as it is and it's all right. She will carry this, and have it, and love it and make no claim on Lane except his good wishes and respecting what she has to do. That she releases him, all claim, and hopes he finishes up at P.J.C. and does so good in his life and has all joy and good things. Her voice will be clear and steady, and she will be lying, for Lane has been given to read her heart. To see through her. One of the opposite side's blacks raises his arm in what may be greeting, or waving off a bee. There is a mower cutting grass someplace off behind them. It will be a terrible, last-ditch gamble born out of the desperation in Sheri Fisher's soul, the knowledge that she can neither do this thing today nor carry a child alone and shame her family. Her values blocked the way either way, Lane could see, and she has no other options or choice—this lie is not a sin. Galatians 4:16, *Have I then become your enemy*? She is gambling that he is good. There on the table, neither frozen nor yet moving, Lane Dean, Jr., sees all this, and is moved with pity, and also with something more, something without any name he knows, that is given to him in the form of a question that never once in all the long week's thinking and division had even so much as occurred—why is he so sure he doesn't love her? Why is one kind of love any different? What if he has no earthly idea what love is? What would even Jesus do? For it was just now he felt her two small strong soft hands on his, to turn him. What if he was just afraid, if the truth was no more than this, and if what to pray for was not even love but simple courage, to meet both her eyes as she says it and trust his heart? ♦

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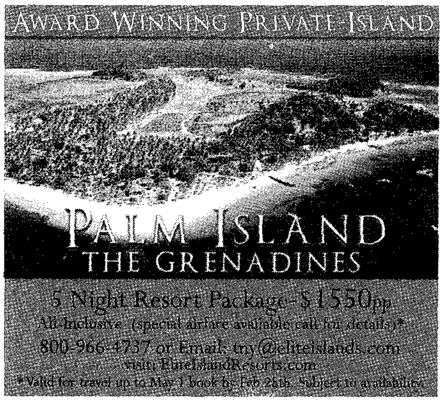
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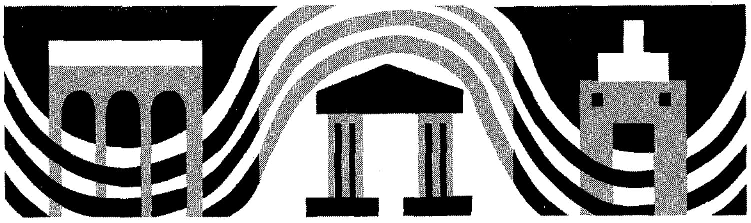


BOOKS

DIFFERENT STROKES

Van Gogh and Gauguin in Arles.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Vincent van Gogh's favorite color was yellow; Paul Gauguin's was red. It was not a trivial difference. It pertains to the clashing, deeply complementary temperaments of two painters whose idiosyncrasies, inseparable from their talents and ideas, became keynotes of modern art and templates of artistic personality. Little about either man fails to fascinate. Both came late to art: Gauguin, the elder by five years, after fitful success as a sailor, financial trader, and family man—he met Impressionist painters first as a collector of their work, then as a protégé—and van Gogh after failures as an art dealer's assistant and a Protestant preacher. Gauguin was short but carried himself with a swagger. Van Gogh was termed by an observer "a rather weedy little man." Van Gogh admired Gauguin. That made two of them. While he liked van Gogh's work well enough, Gauguin's self-centered ambition made any appreciation of colleagues somewhat perfunctory. Van Gogh was an enthusiast for many kinds of art, including Barbizon landscape and a good deal of saloniste academic painting. He disliked, as "almost timid," the tight little brushstrokes of the era's most advanced painter, Paul Cézanne. Gauguin's taste was trendy, with penchants for the medieval and the exotic. He swore by Cézanne. Both van Gogh and Gauguin revered Edgar Degas and—van Gogh, especially—Japanese art. Van Gogh painted almost exclusively from life; Gauguin favored imagination. Van Gogh was innocent and disturbed, Gauguin savvy and louche. In October of 1888, Gauguin left the art colony of Pont-Aven, in Brittany, where he was the leading light, to stay in isolation with van Gogh in the humdrum town of Arles, in Provence. It was a dramatic sojourn.

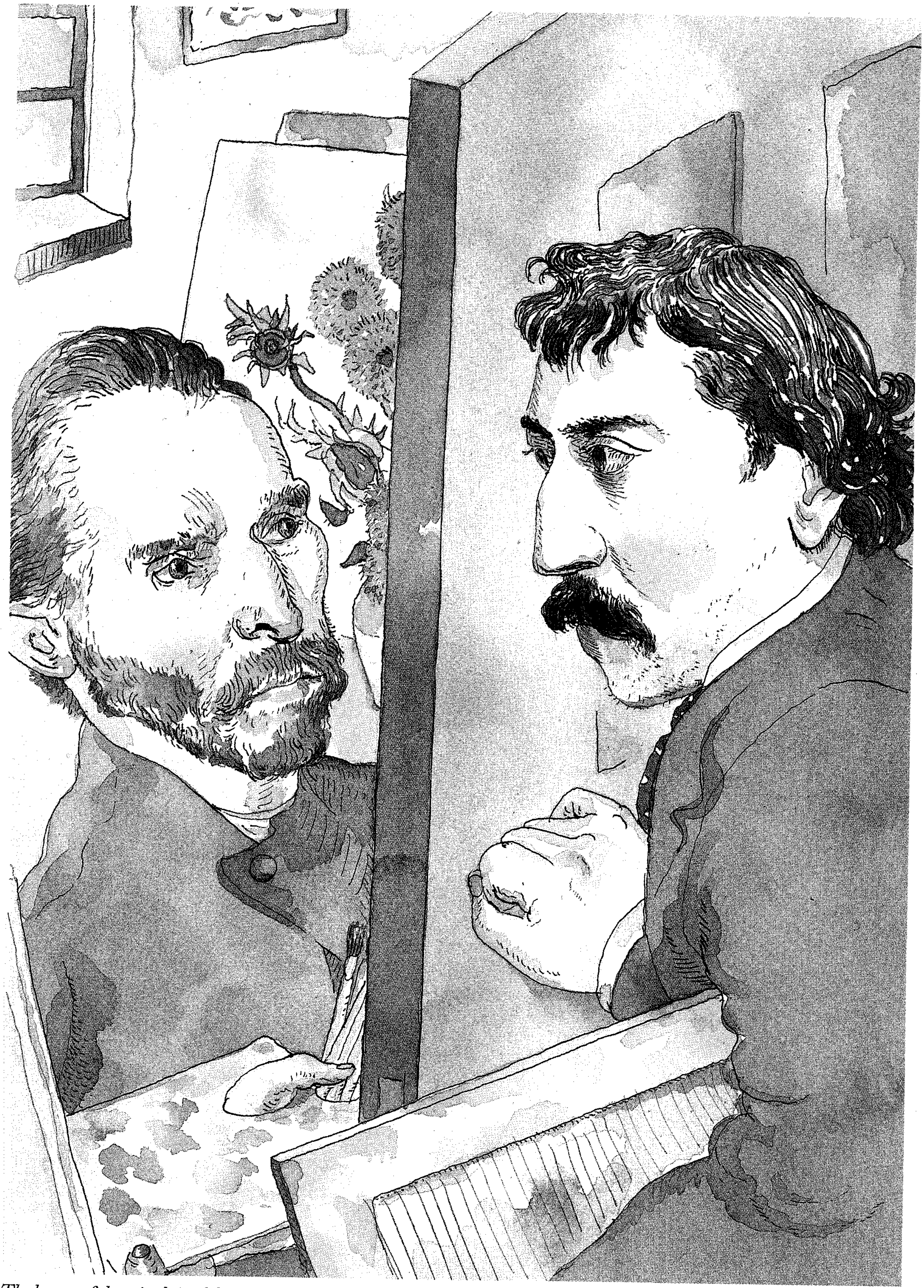
"The Yellow House: Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Nine Turbulent Weeks in Arles" (Little, Brown; $24.99), by Martin Gayford, the chief art critic of Bloomberg Europe, is a skillfully ordered collection of informative and entertaining nuggets of intellectual and personal biography. The book's subtitle, however, is over the top. I count just two really turbulent nights in the story, and a few sticky days. Weeks passed in uneventful amity, or at least forbearance. The climax is sensational, of course: van Gogh razors off all or part of his left ear (the forensic detail is lost to history) and ceremoniously presents it to a prostitute named Rachel. She faints. He is hospitalized. Gauguin flees. The peculiar horror of the episode, in tension with the majesty of van Gogh's art at the time, has made it irresistibly mythological. As a symbol of a supposed kinship of genius and madness, it resonates backward in time to the Greeks and forward to the thoughts of anyone who has wondered at the vagaries of creativity. In an extended anticlimax, Gayford hazards ingenious speculations about van Gogh's febrile thought process (why an ear?) and proposes, for what it's worth, a likely clinical diagnosis: bipolar affective disorder. But, in the way of myth, the event's operative meanings exceed analysis and spurn explanation. They have a life of their own, like art.

"A time will come when people will think I am a myth, or rather something the newspapers have made up," Gauguin wrote in 1897, in a letter from Tahiti. He was a driven self-inventor, ever conscious of his theatrical effect. Born in Paris, he spent his childhood in Lima, Peru, where his mother had family, and in Orléans, France. He went to sea in 1865, at the age of seventeen, and spent six years in the French merchant marine and Navy. Alighting in Paris, he took undemanding, lucrative jobs in finance, and married a Danish woman, Mette Sophie Gad, whom he bullied psychologically and, perhaps, physically. They had five children. Drawing and carving were hobbies for him. He began to buy art, first by Camille Pissarro and then by other Impressionists and Cézanne. The gentle anarchist Pissarro took an interest in the newcomer and effectively guided him for several years. (He eventually turned against him as a careerist.) Édouard Manet and Degas encouraged Gauguin to pursue his work, and, with little academic training, he became the first major artist formed in the ambit of what was not yet called the avant-garde.

After a stock-market crash in 1882, Gauguin launched himself as a painter. The family moved to Copenhagen, where Mette threw him out. Back in France, he became a leader in reactions against both Impressionism and naturalism, promoting symbolic expression and, in a prescient word he often used, "abstraction." Amid the motley bohemian artists of Pont-Aven, he was influenced by the bold innovations, with black-outlined flat hues, of a much younger painter and theorist, Émile Bernard, who was a friend of van Gogh and, crucially, of his younger brother, the adventurous Paris dealer Theo van Gogh. Gauguin promptly trumped Bernard's art with a painting made in the summer of 1888, "The Vision After the Sermon," which charged their common style with sulfurous content: a man wrestles with an angel, watched by solemn Breton women. He then proceeded to make the most of Bernard's connection with the van Gogh brothers.

Van Gogh was born in 1853, in Zundert, in the Netherlands, the son of

BARRY BLITT

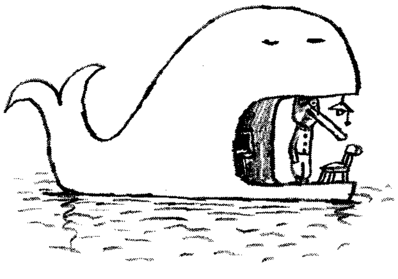


The horror of the episode in Arles, in tension with the majesty of van Gogh's art at the time, has made it irresistibly mythological.

a cultured clergyman and a mother who seems to have despaired of him. (She stored some of his works, and forgot about them.) He grew up religious and hypersensitive, a difficult companion and chronically maladroit in everyday matters. For seven years, from the age of sixteen, he worked for an international art firm in The Hague, London, and Paris, where he was fired for lack of initiative. He was briefly a schoolteacher in England. Rejected in attempts at romance, he had doomed affairs with demimondaines; for a time, he lived with a Dutch prostitute who had two children, gaining a taste of domestic happiness that haunted him ever after. Van Gogh came to rely on prostitutes—"little good women," in his words—but he advised Bernard in a letter, "Don't fuck too much. Your paintings will be all the more spermatic." He became a lay preacher to miners in a desolate part of Belgium but was dismissed for overzealousness and general oddity. ("Children threw things at him as he walked down the street," Gayford recounts; van Gogh suffered similar harassment in Arles.) As he gave himself over to painting, at the age of twenty-six, he invested his faltering religious faith in literature. Gayford writes, "In Vincent's mind, modern novels, with their close descriptions of modern life, love, suffering and labor, were more than a substitute for the Bible—they were its successor. He felt that Christ himself would agree with him on that point." He experienced the characters and events in Zola and Flaubert as virtual realities. (He wrote to Theo that a family friend reminded him of "the first Mrs. Bovary," who barely appears in the novel.) He read Dickens and George Eliot in English. He was a luminous writer himself, in his letters, with flashes of rueful clarity about his mental condition: "I have moments when I am twisted with enthusiasm or madness or prophecy, like a Greek oracle on his tripod."

Starting in 1886, van Gogh spent two years in Paris, living with Theo—to the latter's exasperation and anguish. "All I hope is that he will go and live by himself, and he has talked about this for a long time, but if I told him to leave that would only give him a reason to stay on," Theo wrote. "It appears as if there are two different beings in him, the one marvelously gifted, fine and delicate, the other selfish and heartless." (In van Gogh's final months, his mother wished for an end to the family's burden, praying, she wrote to Theo, "Take him, Lord.") At times funny and charming, and admiring of friends, including Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, van Gogh taxed his fellows in the art world by being, in Gayford's summary, "compulsively articulate, opinionated and tactless." One of them recalled, "He had an extraordinary way of pouring out sentences, if he got started, in Dutch, English and French, then glancing back at you over his shoulder, and hissing through his teeth." At last, van Gogh's suffering sent him south in February, 1888, at the age of thirty-four—"looking for a different light," he later told Theo, and believing "that observing nature under a brighter sky might give one a more accurate idea of the way the Japanese feel and draw." He envisioned founding a "studio of the South" and dunned Gauguin, whom he had met in Paris, and Bernard with invitations to join him. In a little over a year in Arles, he made about two hundred paintings, dozens of them masterpieces. Why was he unrecognized at the time? Personality aside, his style of impasto brushwork (much inspired by an eccentric Marseilles painter, Adolphe Monticelli) in service to visual truth was out of step both with Paris fashion, whose new hero was the methodical Georges Seurat, and with nascent, waking-dream Symbolism, pioneered by Gauguin. Though van Gogh had spells of quiet confidence, he felt, to the last, that his art's fruition lay years in the future.

The two artists exchanged self-portraits before Gauguin's visit. Van Gogh's depicts him as an austere, enigmatic character with eyes like a cat's—as he put it, "a simple" Japanese monk "worshipping the eternal Buddha." He described the work to Gauguin as "all ash-gray"—a cumulative, simmering effect, according to Gayford, "of mixing emerald green and orange on a pale jade background, all harmonized with his reddish-brown clothes." It is a far better picture than Gauguin's devilish presentation of himself as Jean Valjean, of "Les Misérables." (Gauguin wrote to van Gogh that it portrayed a man "strong and badly dressed," with "a nobleness and gentleness hidden within. Passionate blood suffuses the face as it does a creature in rut.") But the Gauguin has zest. It features a lively, off-center composition and begins to divorce line from color in a way that became Gauguin's major contribution to modern painting, notably that of Picasso. The fact that both painters chose to render themselves in fictional guise—van Gogh was inspired by Pierre Loti's popular novel "Madame Chrysanthème," on which Puccini's "Madama Butterfly" was later based—supports Gayford's thesis that for them, in their different ways, life and literature interlocked. The difference emerges in the artists' preferred images: Gauguin's is egotistical and sensual, while van Gogh's is humble and spiritual. With characteristic generosity, van Gogh discerned rare dignity in Gauguin's villainous persona. He called him, in a letter to Bernard, "a virgin creature with savage instincts. With Gauguin blood and sex prevail over ambition."



Actually, ambition was very much involved in 1888, when, as Gayford writes breathlessly, "Paul Gauguin . . . knocked on the door. It was opened by Vincent van Gogh." Gauguin had high hopes of doing business with Theo, who would have been grateful to anyone willing to keep his unnerving brother company, far from Paris. As it turned out, Theo sold several works by Gauguin during his time in Arles—"the dirtiest town in the whole south," the artist decided—while failing to move any by his brother, whose depressions accordingly deepened. Their two-story quarters in Arles were half of a cockeyed butter-yellow house (a grocer occupied the rest) on a busy square. The inside walls were white, the doors blue, and the floors red tile. They had gaslight and running water, but the nearest toilet was in a hotel next door. Gayford guesses that the place smelled strongly of "pipe smoke as well as of turpentine, pigment and Vincent himself—the climate was hot and washing arrangements limited." Gauguin,

MONKEY

The soldiers are children and the monkey's young.
He clings to my leg, heart against calf—
a throat filling, refilling with blood.
Last week, the children ate his mother—
dashed her head against the breadfruit.
A young girl soldier laughs,
tears the baby from my leg
and hurls him toward the tree.
See, she says, you have to be rough.
When she was taken, the girl's
heart, too, pulsed in her throat.

—*Eliza Griswold*

with a sailor's habitual tidiness, was appalled by the messiness of the studio. He took the household in hand and, among other interventions, instituted a budget for the modest amounts of money provided by Theo, who always supported his brother: as Gauguin put it, "so much for hygienic excursions at night" to brothels, "so much for tobacco, so much for incidental expenses, including rent," and so much, in a separate cache, for food. He did most of the cooking.

He was amazed, perhaps despite himself, by van Gogh's decoration of the guest room: paintings, particularly two depicting sunflowers, of a size and intensity—and, in one case, yellowness—never before seen in still-life. But Gauguin never conceded that van Gogh had anything to teach him. (He later claimed, bizarrely, to have freed van Gogh from Seurat-like Pointillism and to have enabled his yellow-on-yellow breakthroughs. Gauguin's memory was a chorus ever improvising songs in praise of himself.) Rather, he urged the younger artist to work, as he did, "*de tête*": from mental images, by invented design. Van Gogh tried, with scant success—except for one later painting that he made in the mental asylum at Saint-Rémy, near Arles, "The Starry Night," which he soon regretted, as "another failure" caused by being "led astray into abstraction."

The two worked hard. They sketched some of the same landscapes and shared portrait models, including the wife of one of van Gogh's few Arles friends, the politically radical postman Joseph Roulin. (Van Gogh gushed to Theo that Roulin's family consisted of "real characters and very French, though they look like Russians"; he seems to have planned to paint them continually over the years, as they changed with age.) Van Gogh's output, which included the acrid and harrowing "Night Café," was torrid. Gauguin's style was in transition; a striking work of the period, "In the Heat," of a half-naked peasant woman and pigs, amounts to a sumptuous dirty joke. A portrait he painted of van Gogh, "The Painter of Sunflowers," is an animated, rather goofy caricature. Their conversation, when not marred by disagreements in art matters, was full of references to literature and the news. They were avid for crime stories, such as the latest exploits of Jack the Ripper, and closely followed the trial, in Paris, of a charismatic murderer named Prado. Gayford surmises that Prado's speeches, in his own defense, struck a chord with van Gogh: "Who am I first of all? What does it matter? I am unfortunate. . . . My God, hurled on to this vast stage of human life, I yielded, a bit by chance, to everything I felt beat in my heart and boil in my brain." (Prado was convicted; Gauguin attended his public execution.)

Gauguin's habits at the time, except perhaps those involving sex, were moderate. Van Gogh drank ruinously. He explained, "If the storm within gets too loud, I take a glass too much to stun myself." The effects were not entirely medicinal. According to Gauguin—whose testimony is often unreliable—he awakened "several nights," toward the end of his stay, to find van Gogh standing over him, whereupon "it was enough for me to say, quite sternly, 'What's the matter with you, Vincent?' for him to go back to bed and fall into a heavy sleep." (No other evidence hints at homosexual attraction—at any rate, a tendency more thinkable about Gauguin, who was given to fiercely dominating relations with other men.) Gauguin reported that, upon viewing "The Painter of Sunflowers," van Gogh said, "It's me, but it's me gone mad," and afterward, in a café, threw a glass of absinthe at Gauguin's head. Still, Gauguin stayed. He wanted to go, Gayford recounts, but he wrote to a friend that he meant to do it "in such a way that Theo would be 'bound' to him" and so keep selling his work. The pair travelled forty-two miles to a museum in Montpellier, where paintings by Delacroix and Courbet excited them. But the end was near.

On December 23rd, as Gauguin recalled a few days later in a letter to Bernard, van Gogh asked him if he was going to leave. "And when I said 'Yes' he tore this sentence from a newspaper and put it in my hand: 'the murderer took flight.' " That evening, after the usually pacific van Gogh threatened Gauguin with his razor (or so Gauguin claimed), Gauguin spent the night in a hotel. The next morning, he went in dread to the Yellow House, where a crowd, alerted by Rachel, had gathered. In Gauguin's telling, no one had yet entered the house. He went in with the Arles police commissioner, who asked him, "What have you done to your comrade, Monsieur?" The stairway was splattered with blood. They found van Gogh curled up in bed, motionless. Gauguin told Bernard that he "touched the body, the heat of which showed that it was still alive." He left for Paris shortly afterward, apparently without seeing van Gogh awake, or ever again. Van Gogh was in the hospital for two weeks, then he passed eighteen torrentially productive months, between recurrent breakdowns, first at the Yellow House, until neighbors, complaining that "his instability frightens all the inhabitants," petitioned for his removal; then a year at the asylum in

Saint-Rémy; and, finally, under the care of the compassionate Dr. Paul Gachet, in the village of Auvers-sur-Oise, north of Paris. Absorbed in his work, van Gogh was flattered but unsettled by an admiring essay by the critic Albert Aurier, to whom he protested that his role in art was "of very secondary importance" to that of Gauguin or Adolphe Monticelli. One of van Gogh's paintings sold, for a good price. But turmoil in Theo's business life and his mental state—he was beginning to suffer from tertiary syphilis—made Vincent fear the loss of his allowance. On July 27, 1890, he shot himself in the chest; he survived for two days. Theo died six months later. Gauguin died in 1903, in the Marquesas Islands, also of complications from syphilis, just as he was about to begin a jail sentence for insulting local authorities.

Gayford analyzes van Gogh's self-mutilation rather as if it were an art work, in a style that was influenced not only by Jack the Ripper, who cut off a prostitute's ear, but also by at least two texts: Zola's novel "The Sin of Father Mouret," in which a friar chastises an altar boy, named Vincent, by pulling his ear, and later has his own ear lopped off by an assailant; and the Bible, where the disciple Peter slices off the ear of one of the men who have come to arrest Jesus at Gethsemane. Gayford piles on the evidence, making his case plausible to a degree (for instance, van Gogh had tried to do a painting on the theme of Gethsemane), but the effort begs the question of why van Gogh's hysterical self-blame took a gruesome turn when his friendship with Gauguin collapsed. For that, the psychiatric label of bipolarity will serve both as well as and as badly as such previous conjectures, enumerated by Gayford, as "an overdose of digitalis, lead poisoning (from paint), absinthe-induced hallucinations, a condition of the inner ear named Ménière's disease, severe sunstroke and glaucoma," not to mention "schizophrenia, syphilis, epilepsy, acute intermittent porphyria"—George III's probable malady—"and borderline personality disorder."

The painting on van Gogh's easel on the night of his self-mutilation, which he finished a few weeks later, was "La Berceuse," a rousingly colored portrait of Joseph Roulin's wife, Augustine, sitting calmly in a chair, holding a string that she uses to rock her baby's cradle. Gayford describes the wallpaper behind her: "Huge white blossoms—dahlias, according to Vincent—sway on long thin stalks, tendrils and leaves twine against a background of thousands of small blue-green forms, each with a red dot in the middle, like a bud, or a pod, or a breast." He writes that van Gogh "compared the picture with a cheap religious print" while intending it, in the artist's words, "to achieve in painting what the music of Berlioz and Wagner has already done . . . an art that offers consolation for the broken-hearted!" Fired by Pierre Loti's book "An Iceland Fisherman," van Gogh imagined the painting hanging in the cabin of a boat, he wrote to Gauguin, where, on account of it, endangered and lonely fishermen "would feel the old sense of being rocked come over them and remember their own lullabies." Gayford goes on to adduce still other literary, artistic, and religious sources of inspiration for the work. None of that comes across in the painting, though it is consistent with the subject's oddly combined airs of looming mass and serene stillness. The work communicates mastery, revelling in itself.

Creativity takes what it needs from the person who possesses it, or is possessed by it, and discards the rest. In van Gogh's case, two realities—that of what he saw and that of what he used (paint, line, color)—laid imperious claim to his energies. The disciplined, mutual fulfillment of subject and medium transcended whatever he thought or felt while conceiving and executing his work. Something similar can be said of any great artist, though rarely with so jolting a sense of psychological odds overcome. Van Gogh became a hero of modern culture for demonstrating "grace under pressure" to a dizzying extreme. Gayford notes that "La Berceuse" thrilled Henri Matisse, Pierre Bonnard, and Édouard Vuillard, not with any extractable meaning but with form "which made a whole world of its own." In an important way, that world excludes its maker, who, at the time, happened to be crazy. Here we come to a classic controversy. If dosed with the proper mood-stabilizing drug in 1888, would van Gogh have become, as Gayford ventures, "a different—and probably a duller—artist"? Given that van Gogh was never dull, I think it would have been worth the risk.

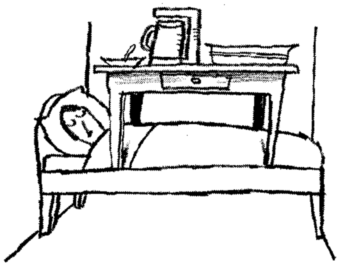
It is hard not to judge Gauguin harshly, in comparison with van Gogh; there's a meanness about him. But keep in mind that Gauguin sought disapproval: the dynamism of his character and the intelligence of his style, organized by an antinomian urge to shock, proved more crucial to the ethos of avant-gardism than van Gogh's genius did. Picasso spoke astutely, in 1935, of "the torments of van Gogh" and "Cézanne's anxiety" as the engines of our interest in their work: "the drama of the man." But when it came to active dramatizing, in the face of a projected, despised bourgeois society, Gauguin blazed a way for Picasso, his fellow artistic and sexual conquistador, and for every artist, to this day, who has adopted an attitude of renegade or subversive temerity.

As a performance, Gayford's book is quite in the raffish spirit of Gauguin, who comes off considerably better than in other tellings of the Arles saga. He jumps off the page, to the palpable gratification of an author who is adept at sparkling quotation (in his own translations from the French) and punchy narrative. Now and then, Gayford almost seems to share Gauguin's irritation at van Gogh's importunate neediness and passive-aggressive sulks. The bias proves salutary. It forestalls the sentimental self-congratulation with which we may dote on a victim of misunderstanding whose actual company we couldn't have stood for an hour, let alone nine weeks. The book breaks no new ground as art history and criticism, but it provides a vivid snapshot of issues and passions at a key moment in the formation of modern sensibility. Imagine! A couple of disreputable men in a nowhere town slap paint on canvas and thereby change everything. It has been a long time now, half a century after Abstract Expressionism, since that scenario had its last echo in a real artistic or cultural development, except in tones of irony or elegy. No individual can any longer dandle the world at the end of a brush. The legend is correspondingly estranged and enhanced. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Castle in the Forest, *by Norman Mailer (Random House; $27.95).* Mailer's new novel chronicles the life of Adolf Hitler from birth through his early teen years. The story is narrated by D.T., a demon who acts as a guardian to the future Führer. This conceit brings a glint of dark Miltonian comedy to the bleak, and familiar, details of his early biography: the parents' consanguinity, the father's brutality, the mother's unhappiness, the children's illnesses—all produce alienation and humiliation. As a stylist, Mailer remains captivating, if sometimes infuriating, and he clearly relishes exploring taboo corners of his protagonist's being—his coprophilia, the sexual pleasure he takes in acts of violence, his simultaneous guilt and thrill over his malignant behaviors. Yet, strangely, Hitler is overshadowed as a character by the more vividly realized personalities around him. As if to bear out his profound fears of inferiority, he cannot quite hold the center even of his own life story.

The Year of Endless Sorrows, *by Adam Rapp (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $15).* In this first adult novel by an author known for his plays and his young-adult fiction, an aspiring writer flees the Midwest for the East Village, where he keeps a steadily growing manuscript "about knee pain and the end of the world" in the freezer of his roach-infested tenement. He narrates a year in the city with appealing irony, portraying himself as the straight man opposite a cast of misfit roommates, inane corporate bosses, and zany love interests. Rapp's dramatic skill yields strong characters and some good set pieces, but his story has a tendency to meander, and is sometimes tonally discordant. An episode at a party where the narrator's date strips and then urinates on a salmon platter is broadly comic but leaves the reader unprepared for a genuine tragedy a few chapters later.



The Foundation, *by Joel L. Fleishman (PublicAffairs; $27.95).* Dwight Macdonald once called the Ford Foundation "a large body of money completely surrounded by people who want some," but Fleishman contends that foundations, since their inception, at the start of the twentieth century, have given the U.S. a significant advantage in economic and social development. Fleishman writes that in 2005 "about 68,000 foundations of all kinds existed in the United States, controlling estimated assets of half a trillion dollars and making annual grants totaling $33.6 billion," and he points to many examples of their contributions to American life (including the 911 phone system and "Sesame Street"). He is optimistic about the future of philanthropy in the U.S., but he cautions that foundations have often been able to operate in obscurity, even when they are administering quasi-governmental programs, and he urges that they move toward greater transparency.

The Adventures of a Cello, *by Carlos Prieto, translated from the Spanish by Elena C. Murray (Texas; $24.95).* Prieto, a Mexican cellist, mixes historical research and memoir in this biography of his cello, a Stradivarius from 1720 that he acquired in 1979. Antonio Stradivari made many fewer cellos than violins, and Prieto's, nicknamed the Piatti after an illustrious nineteenth-century cellist, is held to be one of his best. Prieto's archival work shows that it probably stayed in the Stradivari family and then travelled to Spain, where it would have been used, in 1787, in the first performance of Haydn's "Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross." The cello spent most of the twentieth century owned by two members of the Mendelssohn family, both amateur players, the younger of whom managed to smuggle it out of Nazi Germany on a bicycle.

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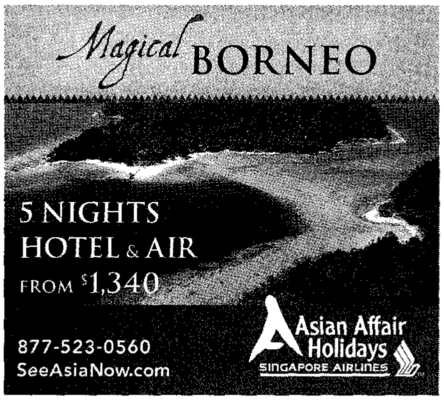
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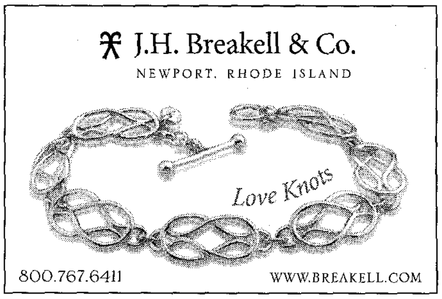
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ON TELEVISION

HOSTILE ACTS

"The Sarah Silverman Program" puts the mean back in funny.

BY TAD FRIEND

Hostility may be the engine of humor, but the broadcast networks dread its snarl. Whenever they air a truly mean sitcom, such as the long-gone "Buffalo Bill" or "Action," the audience flees, so TV executives have learned to muffle their comedies' barbs in "Only kidding" smirks and "You're the greatest" hugs. Even on "Seinfeld," which forbade hugs and learning, the core foursome reserved their mockery for outsiders, for the close-talkers and regifters. They were there for one another—the network made sure that we saw the love beneath.

So "The Sarah Silverman Program," much the meanest sitcom in years—and one of the funniest—premières this week, perforce, on Comedy Central. Silverman, the telescope-necked comedienne, has had trouble finding the right showcase for the contrary elements of her persona: the post-feminist tomboy who's sexually cocky and emotionally frigid, the eerily alert counterpuncher who's totally self-involved. (In her 2005 concert movie, "Sarah Silverman: Jesus Is Magic," Silverman makes out with her own mirrored image.) She is best known for jarring "The Aristocrats," the documentary about a legendary joke, with her deadpan claim that "Joe Franklin raped me," and for dropping the epithet "chinks" into a joke on "Late Night with Conan O'Brien." Unlike many comedians, Silverman excavates prejudice less by digging into her own background (though in one episode she insincerely promises "full-frontal Jew-dity") than by strip-mining the turf of other minorities, particularly blacks and gays. Her game is to throw out stereotypes in a little-girl voice and with a winsome look that suggests no offense can legitimately be taken. You might admire Silverman's boldness, or you might feel that there's something sneaky in her appropriation of slurs that never wounded her—that it's the standup equivalent of the person who cuts in line and then can't believe you object.

The show's credits beguile us into anticipating yet another wry, candid-seeming look at a comedian's private life, à la "Seinfeld" or "Curb Your Enthusiasm"; as a low-tech slide show on Silverman and her friends and her Los Angeles neighborhood clicks by, she says things like "Hi, I'm Sarah Silverman, and I'm just like you. I live in Valley Village, I don't have a job, and my sister pays the rent!" But Silverman's show is both shaggier in structure and flintier in sensibility than its precursors. After gulping cough syrup, the Sarah character takes a "Pee-wee's Playhouse"-style animated trip into space and has a giddy exchange with the Loch Ness monster. She also regularly breaks into soulful songs that end up being, in a childhood-anxiety sort of way, about poop ("I really love my life and I'll also tell you what/If I find a stick I'll put it in your mama's butt/And pull it out and stick/The doody in her eye!"). The show's only formal rigor is Sarah's own: her beefs and run-ins always showcase her intolerance (at the expense of Silverman's winsome streak). When a driver in a red Ford Focus pulls up alongside her red Ford Focus and cheerily observes, "Hey, same car!," Sarah parrots his remark with an expression of utter spastic disgust.

Self-absorption plays a starring role. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

When God admires one of her songs and materializes in front of her, Sarah, surprised that he's black, inquires, "Are you God's black friend?" Later, calling him Black God, she reassures him, "I'm not one of those people who's, like, 'Oh, God is black—is he going to steal the moon, or something?' " (Much of Silverman's comedy springs from the device of digging the hole deeper.) To prove her color blindness, she seduces him. "Who made you, monkey? Who created you?" he intones during their lovemaking. "You did!" she cries, squeakily.

In the morning, when Black God wants to cuddle and take her to Heaven to meet Thomas Jefferson, she squirms away—as if! Just another notch on her belt, and she's right back to watching TV in her sweatpants, confiding in her dog (played by her actual dog), and hanging out at the local café with her straight-man sister, Laura (played by her actual sister), and her red-bearded gay neighbors, Steve (Steve Agee) and Brian (an endearing Brian Posehn, as a schlub whose conversational trial balloons always get shot down). Laura is a nurse, supposedly—at least, she wears a white uniform—but the others view jobs as a lot of work. The same goes for cooking, reading, making plans, and doing favors for friends. When Sarah's buddy Natalie asks for her help moving, Sarah's excuse is "I stubbed my vagina."

Brian and Steve are an appealing couple: they bump fists and say, "I'm so gay for you," then bicker about whether Brian should try drinking Tab or whether, as he insists, he's really bisexual. Sarah's crowd punishes sexual indeterminacy: when she suddenly decides that she's a lesbian, everyone scoffs. "As a lesbian, I resent your laughter," Sarah says. "And all laughter." Is the joke about identity politics? Lesbians? Or is it on us: *So you think lesbians are humorless*? At times, you wonder whether you're laughing with Silverman or at her, and then you realize that she's laughing at you.

Silverman dispatches empathy with a kind of emotional judo. When Sarah and an older black woman start chatting at the market, a bond seems possible:

> WOMAN: You know, family is the most important thing in life. It's who you are.
> SARAH: That is so wise.
> WOMAN: Well, that's just what comes with being seventy.
> SARAH: No, you're not! There is no way you are seventy! You look too young! . . . (*The woman moves in for a hug, but Sarah halts her.*) Oh, now that you're closer I can tell you're old.

No hugs, no learning—and screw you. The woman's first mistake was to venerate family, which doesn't appear to be in Sarah's future—or her past. In the opening credits, Sarah breezily mentions that her parents are dead (Silverman's actual parents are very much alive), an orphaning seemingly intended to emphasize her reliance on her pals. But this surrogate family comes swaddled in air quotes, in allusions to sitcoms of yore. Sarah and Laura are like Mary and Rhoda or Laverne and Shirley; Brian and Steve are versions of the across-the-hall neighbor Howard Borden on "The Bob Newhart Show"; and Laura's new patrolman boyfriend, Officer Jay (Jay Johnston), is a mixture of Officer Simpson, on "Gimme a Break!," and Officer Barbrady, on "South Park." Officer Jay's dialogue parodies the earnest, halting speeches that scriptwriters like to give to working stiffs: "You know, being a cop, I've seen things that make you crap a book on how to puke," he tells Laura. "But—I've never seen your kind of compassion." His arrival reveals the fractures in the group—Sarah despises him, and Steve and Brian don't even bother to be polite—and we realize that all of them are fundamentally loners who grew up in front of the TV. They enjoy bantering, as people on TV do, but they aren't up for shouldering one another's burdens.

Having absorbed television's portrayal of gays, Sarah asks Steve and Brian to practice their gay cosmetic arts on a girl she's coaching for a beauty pageant—to "do a whole montage on her, make her look fabulous and stuff." As the show punctures one TV cliché after another, you recognize the medium's pervasive gimcrack buoyancy: the overstrenuous group laughter that ends in a freeze-frame; the moment when two characters who got off on the wrong foot begin to apologize simultaneously; the treacly rejoinder to a child who says she wants to make you proud ("Oh, sweetie, I'm already proud of you" is the line, but Sarah adds, sombrely, "All you can do is make me unproud"); the on-second-thought pursuit of a departing lover through the rain until the lover spins around to receive a tearful confession and a sloppy kiss. Sarah skips that particular payoff in favor of a last gibe: "You enjoy spending *your* life alone!"

Touché. The brilliance of the show—the force of its argument that sitcoms turn us into loserish loners—is also its abiding flaw. We admire the purity of Silverman's scornfulness, but we don't want to hang out with her the way we did with Mary and Rhoda. Not that she'd let us get that close anyway. "The Sarah Silverman Program" is like a club so exclusive that only the owner can get in—not even God is on the list. ♦

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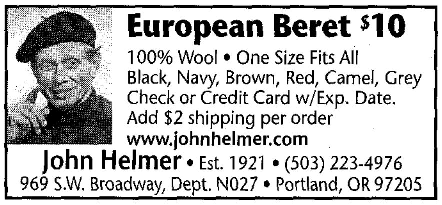
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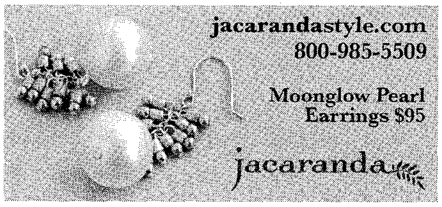
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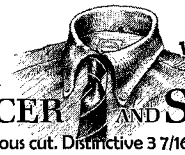

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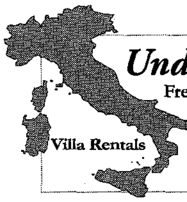

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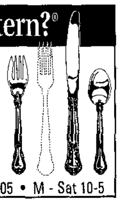

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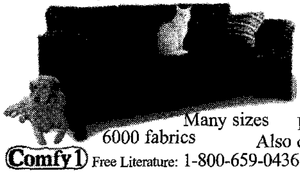

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THE THEATRE

IN BLACK AND WHITE

Amiri Baraka's "Dutchman."

BY HILTON ALS

In 1963, LeRoi Jones, a twenty-eight-year-old poet from Newark, New Jersey, sat down and wrote a play. Titled "Dutchman," Jones's one-act work was more or less finished twenty-four hours after its inception. In his 1984 autobiography, the author (who, in 1967, prompted by Malcolm X's assassination two years earlier, abandoned his "slave name" to become Amiri Baraka, or Blessed Prince) wrote, "I can see now that the dramatic form began to interest me because I wanted to go 'beyond' poetry. I wanted some kind of action literature." The "action literature" that he created would likely have made the great Thespis yelp. In "Dutchman," he not only picked up some of the themes that Strindberg had explored in "Miss Julie," his hallucinatory 1888 examination of class and gender, but added that other great taboo: race.

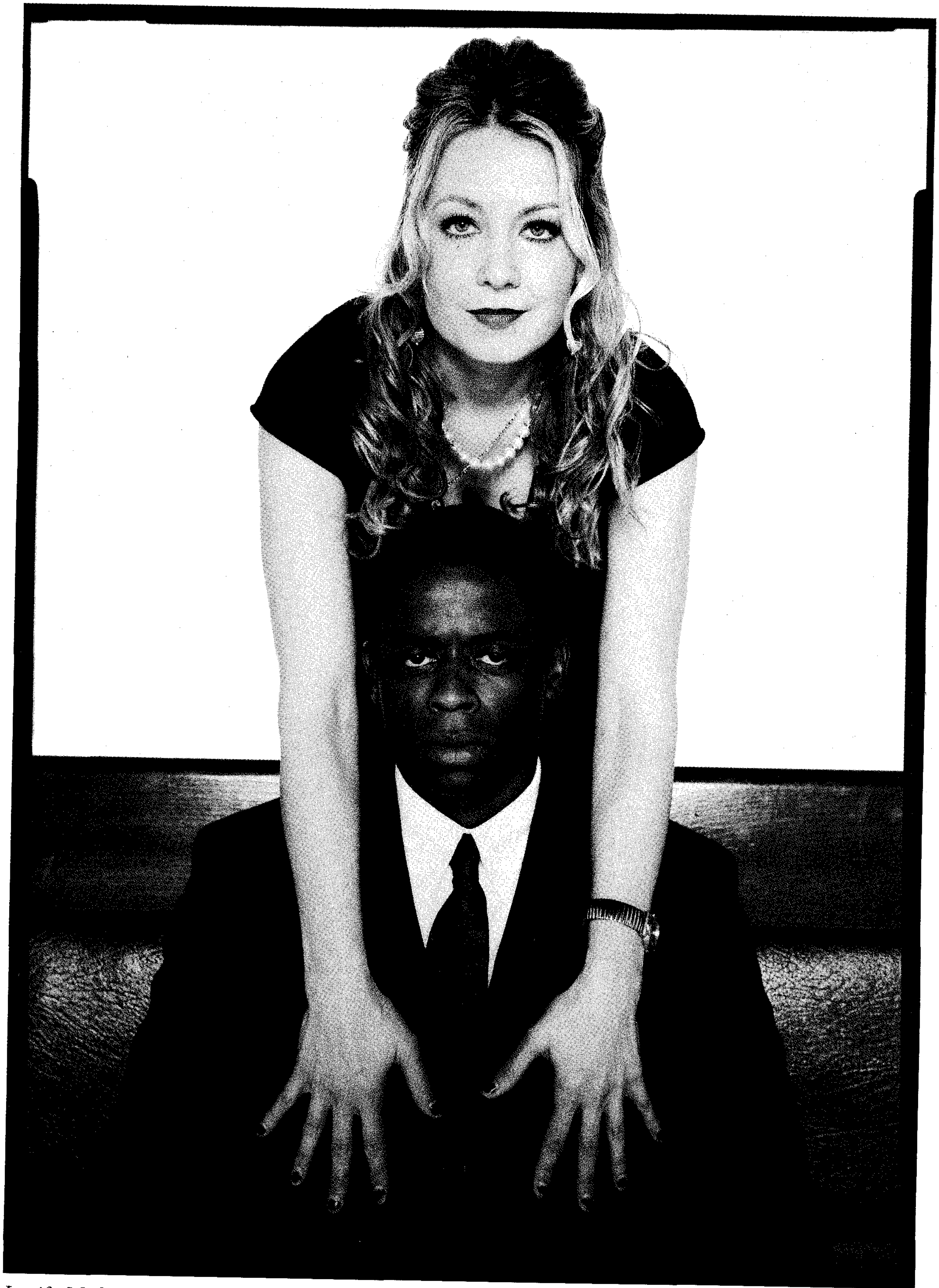
Reading Baraka's script today is like watching an expert butcher at his bloody chopping block. One hears a terrible kind of music as the playwright slices through his characters' flesh, bones, and cartilage. Lula and Clay, the white woman and the black man who are the play's protagonists, screech and wail at each other in ghastly speeches, which recall the bruising hooks and repetitions that Baraka's contemporary Ornette Coleman laid down on his 1961 disk, "Free Jazz." Take, for instance, Lula's characterization of Clay, shortly after they meet:

> You look like you been trying to grow a beard. That's exactly what you look like. You look like you live in New Jersey with your parents and are trying to grow a beard. That's what. You look like you've been reading Chinese poetry and drinking lukewarm sugarless tea. (*Laughs, uncrossing and recrossing her legs*) You look like death eating a soda cracker.

Her analysis of Clay's pretensions is actually solicited by Clay: half-jokingly, he asks her to describe him as she sees him. (We are also meant to understand that Baraka was indicting his own bohemianism here.) Clay is complicit in his sparring partner's disgust. Would she express her contempt so gleefully if it weren't obvious to her—she is an animal who can instantly sniff out fear—that her whiteness and femininity matter more to Clay than his own "lukewarm" manhood?

These are some of the thoughts that cross one's mind at the beginning of Bill Duke's thrilling revival of the show, at the Cherry Lane, where it first opened on March 24, 1964, and created a sensation. The play is still a sensation. Upon entering the small theatre, the audience immediately feels as if it were in a "No Exit" situation. Projected across two panels blocking the stage are images from the New York subway system. The houselights flash and then darken like the lights of a subway car. A tall elderly black conductor (Paul Benjamin) enters the theatre and walks down the aisle with a Bojangles-like strut and shuffle. Pushing the two panels aside and disappearing from view, he leaves us in a subway car with Clay (Dulé Hill), a handsome black man in a dark suit who sits reading a book. (The appropriately skeletal and realistic set is by Troy Hourie. Drew Levy and Tony Smolenski's sound design—we hear trains screeching and steel wheels rumbling in tunnels throughout the play—contributes to the eerie atmosphere.) Clay's train pulls into a station. On the platform just outside, a thirtyish white woman (the phenomenal Jennifer Mudge) walks by, spies Clay, and smiles knowingly. She enters the car slowly, casually, her hips and breasts moving to and fro in her light summer dress. Her long gold-streaked brown hair is a tangle of Medusa curls.

Clay pretends not to notice Lula as she bends over, rummages through her satchel, and pulls out an apple. But pretty soon there is no way for him to avoid looking at this urban Eve. Nor can Lula resist the desire that she assumes she inspires. Sitting a little too close to Clay, she exchanges a few pleas-



Jennifer Mudge and Dulé Hill as Baraka's controversial strangers on a train. Photograph by Steve Pyke.

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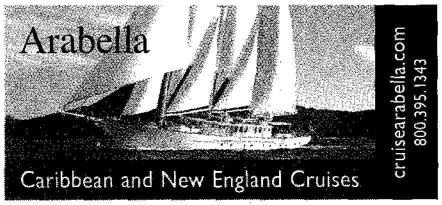
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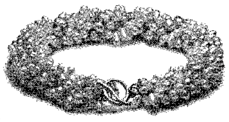
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antries before the dance of death begins.

> LULA: Weren't you staring at me through the window?
> CLAY (*wheeling around and very much stiffened*): What?
> LULA: Weren't you staring at me through the window? At the last stop?
> CLAY: Staring at you? What do you mean?
> LULA: Don't you know what staring means?
> CLAY: I saw you through the window . . . if that's what it means. I don't know if I was staring. Seems to me you were staring through the window at me.
> LULA: I was. But only after I'd turned around and saw you staring through that window down in the vicinity of my ass and legs.

Clay's stiffening in response to Lula's accusations indicates the level of fear that this country's historically murderous response to miscegenation can provoke in a black man. (Eldridge Cleaver described the soul-lacerating effects of that history four years later, in his memoir, "Soul on Ice": "The white man forbade me to have the white woman on pain of death. . . . Men die for freedom but black men die for white women, who are the symbol of freedom. . . . Until the day I can have a white woman in my bed . . . I will still be a slave.") Lula can claim her desire, but Clay cannot acknowledge his. Lula has whiteness—which is to say, power—on her side. "I lie a lot," she tells Clay offhandedly. "It helps me control the world." What Clay has, and must protect, is his relative invisibility. One gets the sense that all he wants is to get by.

Still, Hill overplays Clay's "niceness," which does the role a disservice—or, more precisely, undermines what it could be. He shrinks too far into Clay's recessive nature, so that when, near the end of the show, he finally explodes at Lula ("I'll rip your lousy breasts off!") it feels more like an apoplectic coda—the ramblings of an impotent poseur—than what Baraka intended: the outpouring of a soul filled with a rage that is too great to express or expel.

Hill gives Mudge less than she needs to play against, but that's all right: she owns Lula. Her performance is so profound an evocation of worldly disgust and self-disgust that one feels as if Hill were there merely to feed her the lines. Whether she's eating an apple or taunting Clay or mocking his aspirations with bile and knowing ("You're an escaped nigger. . . . You crawled through the wire and made tracks to my side"), Mudge tears into Baraka's blight, into the poetry he finds in the nightmare of being. She embodies his ideas so utterly that one begins to think of "Dutchman" as a monologue.

And, in some sense, it is. For Baraka uses Lula as a foil to call himself out: as one of the only black writers of the time who crossed over into the world of white hipness; as a black man who refused to apologize for his attraction to white women and homosexual culture. For a time, Baraka had been a kind of blessed child. The world of the Greenwich Village avant-garde was his oyster. He'd published highly regarded essays on jazz in magazines like the *Evergreen Review;* he'd done dope with the black artist Bob Thompson. But, after a trip to Cuba in 1960, he began to question his relationship to the white world that had helped foster his career. Although "Dutchman" won an Obie, it received mixed reviews, and some of his white colleagues reacted to it with shock and fear as well as awe: it was a slap in the face to their belief that art was "raceless." A year later, Baraka left the downtown literary scene and started the Black Arts movement in Harlem, then took it to Newark, where he sought to make theatre by and for black people. He embraced Communism; his plays became dependent on the ideology that was evident in his first collection of poems, "Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note" (1961). In 2002, he put out an inflammatory poem about the origins of the September 11th attacks. Baraka has set out to remake the world each time he has remade himself. Indeed, he *is* the action literature he sought to produce: restless, raw, sermonizing, reactive, a successor to the transcendentalists Bronson Alcott and Nathaniel Hawthorne, men who wrote about the filth of their civilization because they couldn't stand to live with anything less than pure.

"Dutchman" 's rough iconoclasm is a kind of dissonant paean to that puritanism; it remains as seditious today as it was in 1964. (The night I saw it, the audience gasped when Lula attacked Clay's mother, or, more specifically, the idea of black motherhood.) Here Baraka's strengths as a dramatist make criticism of his later choices seem beside the point. One simply wants to enter into the taut narrative of the play, to be an observer on that train to nowhere. By bringing so much of America—its myths, its lore, its hatreds—onstage in "Dutchman," Baraka changed the theatre forever. Many of us are still trying to figure out how he did it. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

TOWARD SILENCE

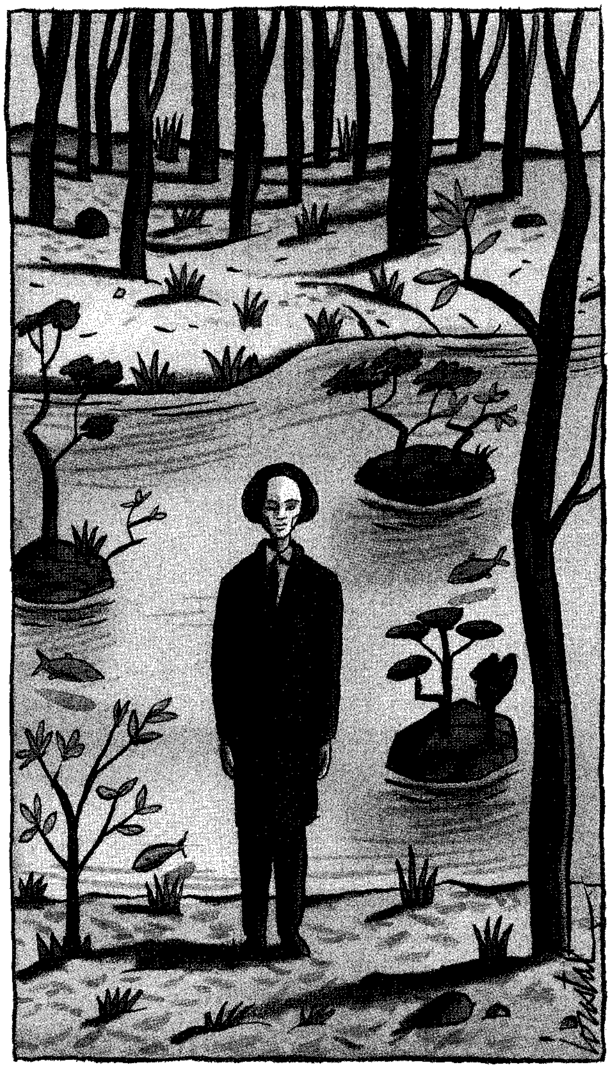
The intense repose of Toru Takemitsu.

BY ALEX ROSS

Near the end of the Second World War, soldiers and civilians on the Japanese home front constructed networks of underground bases in anticipation of an invasion that never came. In one of those dugout fortresses, in the mountains west of Tokyo, the future composer Toru Takemitsu was stationed in 1944; he was all of fourteen years old. Although no music aside from patriotic songs was allowed, one day a kindhearted officer ushered the children-soldiers into a back room and played some records for them, using a windup phonograph with a handmade bamboo needle. One disk had Lucienne Boyer singing "Parlez-Moi d'Amour." Takemitsu listened, he later said, in a state of "enormous shock." After so much sunless, soulless labor, that winsome chanson opened a world of possibility in his mind. Ever after, he honored the moment as the birth of his musical consciousness.

Takemitsu died in 1996, at the age of sixty-five. He was by far the most celebrated of Japanese composers, although his position in the firmament of modern music was not exactly dominant; some Western commentators condescendingly described him as an artist of a decorative type, a purveyor of atmospheric wisps of sound. In the past decade or so, however, his music has started edging into the repertory. Carnegie Hall has presented several Takemitsu performances this season, most recently a concert by the violist Yuri Bashmet and the Moscow Soloists. Recordings have multiplied into the dozens, on such labels as DG, BIS, and Naxos. Film connoisseurs cherish Takemitsu's scores for various masterpieces of postwar Japanese cinema.

Critics have underestimated Takemitsu because of the unstinting sensuousness of his music. It is rich in opulent chords, luminous textures, exotic tones that almost brush the skin, hazy melodies that move like figures in mist. The titles give a sense of the sound: "Twill by Twilight," "Toward the Sea," "How Slow the Wind." Yet the picture-book atmosphere is periodically disrupted by harsh timbres, rumblings of dissonance, engulfing masses of tone. Loveliness vanishes into darkness before it can be fully apprehended, like the song that Takemitsu heard inside the mountain.

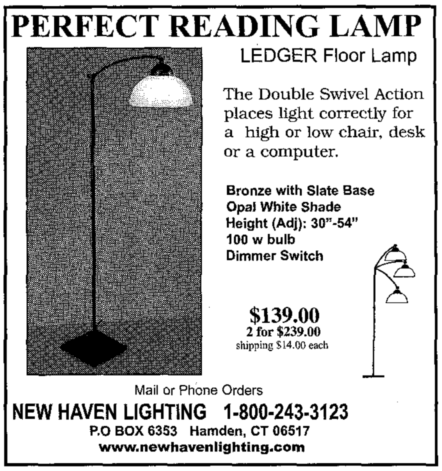


Takemitsu's works are edging into the repertory.

JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

Immediately after the end of the war, Takemitsu began teaching himself music, picking up techniques from a curious jumble of sources: his father's jazz collection; canonical modern pieces by Debussy, Schoenberg, and Messiaen; American works that showed up on Armed Forces radio and in reëducation libraries during the occupation; popular and Romantic melodies that flavored movie soundtracks. (An obsessive cinéaste, he attended up to three hundred films a year.) A little later, he began investigating Western avant-garde ideas, falling under the spell of John Cage. There was a circularity to this chain of influence, because both Debussy and Cage, in their very different ways, had been heavily affected by Japanese music and Japanese thought. In a sense, Takemitsu was taking back what his tradition had given to the West.

The work that launched Takemitsu's international career was the Requiem for Strings, written in 1957. Stravinsky happened to hear it during a trip to Japan; radio engineers played it for the great man by accident, and, when they were about to go back to the intended playlist, he asked them not to stop. Stravinsky praised the composer in interviews, and prizes and commissions from Western groups quickly followed. The Requiem shows Takemitsu's style in embryo: the first violins begin with a soft, sustained F-sharp; second violins and cellos add a thick chord that consists of E-flat-major and B-flat-major triads superimposed; and the violas play a high phrase that twists slowly in place as harmonies shift underfoot. Peter Burt, in his book "The Music of Toru Takemitsu," observes that the first few bars vaguely resemble Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings," and speculates that Barber's score may have been found in the library of the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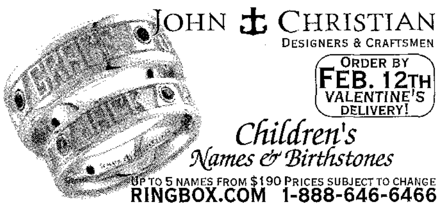
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Stravinsky catapulted Takemitsu to fame, but film scores brought the composer to his widest public. While composers in America and the Soviet Union wrote film music to pay the bills, Takemitsu had the good fortune to work with directors who encouraged him to experiment. Some of the most astringent sounds in his output appear in the score for Hiroshi Teshigahara's brilliant, eerie 1964 film "Woman in the Dunes," where the shifting sands are represented by sirenlike glissando strings and electronically altered tones. One director who contested Takemitsu's independence was, not surprisingly, Akira Kurosawa, who demanded Mahlerian sonorities for his 1985 epic "Ran." Takemitsu lost that fight, but, arguably, the neo-Romanticism of "Ran" led him toward the style of his late period, when he permitted himself a long-breathed lyricism that he had earlier avoided.

Takemitsu's career, like that of many a twentieth-century composer, took the form of an outward journey and an eventual homecoming. What's notable is that along the way he rediscovered his identity as a Japanese artist, having initially rejected tradition out of disgust with the hyper-nationalism of imperial Japan. Above all, he prized the concept of *ma*—the "powerful silence," as he defined it, which is set in relief by a single, equally powerful sound. Most of his mature works begin with a tone materializing from silence, and end with a dematerialization toward silence again.

Takemitsu's aesthetic requires a performer of exceptional abilities. Sounds must be placed with absolute precision. They must have tonal beauty, but not too much sentiment. Forms should unfold like images on a screen, or, as Takemitsu once said, a "picture scroll unrolled." No player better meets these specifications than the pianist Peter Serkin, who was one of the composer's closest friends. Serkin presented a recital of Takemitsu and Bach in a Zankel Hall recital last fall, proceeding from the Messiaen-like meditation "Uninterrupted Rest No. 1," from 1952, to "Rain Tree Sketch II," from 1992, written in Messiaen's memory. In the earlier pieces—I left at intermission to check in on the Beethoven festival at Lincoln Center—Serkin created an atmosphere of intense repose, never letting the music lapse into the realm of the picturesque.

The Moscow Soloists concert, which took place at Zankel Hall last week, and which also included Hikaru Hayashi's Viola Concerto and Tan Dun's Concerto for String Orchestra and Pipa, became an unfortunate lesson in how Takemitsu shouldn't be performed. The program began with the 1987 string piece "Nostalghia," written in homage to the great Russian film director Andrei Tarkovsky, and the title is taken from Tarkovsky's most purely lyrical creation, at the end of which a ghostlike abbey looms above a farmhouse. The players had intonation problems from the start, and during the periodic pauses, which should be like intakes of breath, the music simply stopped. Bashmet, who variously played violin and viola and also conducted, was on surer ground when he took the podium to conduct excerpts from three Takemitsu film scores: "José Torres," "Black Rain," and "Face of Another." This is music of a more extroverted, popular character—the post-atomic lament of "Black Rain" excepted—and the Moscow Soloists dug in with vigor.

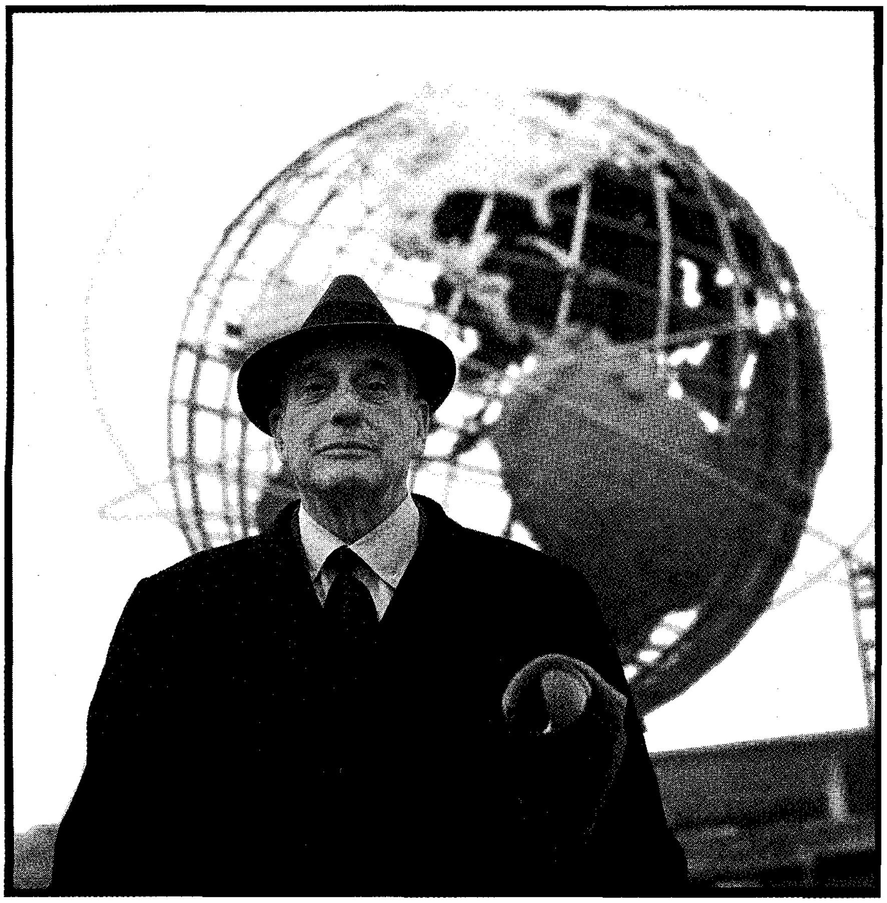
If convincing performances of Takemitsu are hard to pull off in concert halls, they are easily found on recordings. The conductor Marin Alsop recently recorded an eloquent version of "A Flock Descends Into the Pentagonal Garden" for Naxos, and Tadaaki Otaka has led several fine collections of orchestral pieces for BIS. Perhaps the best of the bunch is Oliver Knussen's DG disk "Quotation of Dream," which brings together several masterpieces of Takemitsu's final decade; in the title work, a fragment of Debussy's "La Mer" surges to the surface of the music, making explicit the composer's most profound and productive stylistic debt. Listening again, I realized that it is hard to say much about this music other than that it is uncommonly beautiful. Its processes remain mysterious, despite the best efforts of analysts and explicators. It almost shies away from the listener as it transpires, longing to return to the silence whence it came. ♦

THE SKY LINE

EMINENT DOMINION

Rethinking the legacy of Robert Moses.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER



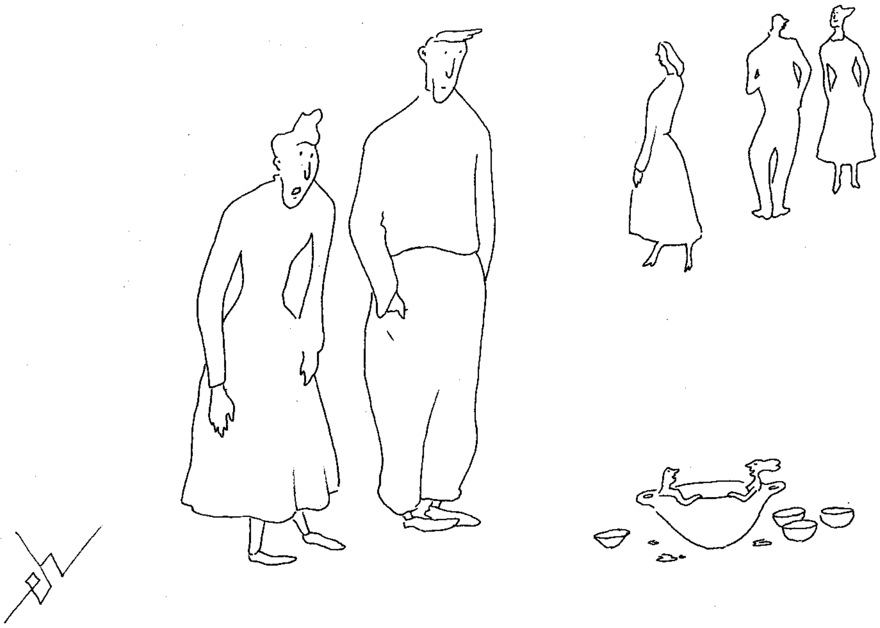
Moses standing in front of the Unisphere at the 1964 World's Fair.

For a generation, the standard view of Robert Moses has been that he transformed New York but didn't really make it better. This view was shaped by Robert Caro's epic biography "The Power Broker"—published in 1974 and in print ever since. (Parts of it initially ran in this magazine.) Caro portrays Moses as a brilliant political operative who perpetuated his power by means of grand public works, filling the landscape with bridges and tunnels and parkways, heedless of people or neighborhoods that might get in the way of them. The notion of Moses as the evil genius of mid-twentieth-century urban design got a boost last spring in obituaries of and tributes to Jane Jacobs, a longtime antagonist, who was instrumental in defeating one of his most outrageously wrongheaded schemes, the Lower Manhattan Expressway, which would have destroyed much of SoHo. Almost every article about Jacobs included a swipe at Moses, whose arrogance and lack of interest in the texture of the city seemed a harsh contrast to Jacobs's love of neighborhoods, streets, and, by implication, people.

Jacobs's book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," published in 1961, all but put an end to the idea that the way to improve old urban neighborhoods was to tear them down and replace them with towers and expressways. By the time Moses died, in 1981, his tendency to see public works as a form of machismo had fallen almost entirely out of fashion. Whereas he celebrated big things and his ability to build them, Jacobs changed the way people thought about cities by teaching them to focus on little things.

Moses—who began his marathon career under Governor Al Smith, in the nineteen-twenties, and was forced from power by Governor Nelson Rockefeller, in 1968—has been gone for more than a quarter of a century, and New York, which was decrepit and nearly bankrupt when Caro's book appeared, is a different place. Moses is clearly due for a reëvaluation, and this week sees the opening of "Robert Moses and the Modern City," a huge exhibition that surveys his impact on New York. Organized by Hilary Ballon, an architectural historian at Columbia, the exhibition extends over three institutions. The broadest installation, at the Museum of the City of New York, is called "Remaking the Metropolis," and presents Moses's highway system and the big institutions, like Lincoln Center and the United Nations, that he helped build. "The Road to Recreation," at the Queens Museum of Art, documents Moses's new parks, playgrounds, and swimming pools; and "Slum Clearance and the Superblock Solution," at Columbia's Wallach Art Gallery, shows his inventive mastery of the federal government's Title I slum-clearance programs, and the results, both good and bad. Ballon and Kenneth Jackson, a prominent historian of New York based at Columbia, have put most of the visual material from the three exhibitions, along with several strong essays, into a forthcoming book, "Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York" (Norton; $50). The title is an obvious retort to Caro's subtitle, "Robert Moses and the Fall of New York," and the book presents itself as a cautious corrective to Caro's view.

Caro called Moses "America's greatest builder," and perhaps the most distinctive service of the exhibition is to bring home the sheer scale of his achievement to a new audience. There are models of many Moses projects and exceptionally elegant color photographs, by Andrew Moore, showing the current state of those projects. The photographs are so beautiful that they make you yearn for a time when enhancing the public realm was a serious calling. Moses



"I know everybody here except the couple in the soup tureen."

• •

built the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, the Triborough Bridge, the Henry Hudson Parkway, the Henry Hudson Bridge, the Southern and Northern State Parkways, the Grand Central Parkway, the Cross Island Parkway, the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge, the Throgs Neck Bridge, the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, the Long Island Expressway, the Meadowbrook Parkway, and the Saw Mill River Parkway. He built Jones Beach State Park (an early masterwork), Orchard Beach, the Niagara and St. Lawrence power projects, the New York Coliseum, and the 1964 World's Fair. By his own count, Moses added six hundred and fifty-eight playgrounds and seventeen public swimming pools to the New York City park system. In Central Park, he added the Conservatory Garden, the Great Lawn, and the Zoo. He played a major role in the creation of Shea Stadium, Stuyvesant Town, Lenox Terrace, Park West Village, Lincoln Towers, Kips Bay Plaza, Washington Square Village, and Co-op City. At one point, Moses held twelve New York City and New York State positions simultaneously. He served under seven governors and five mayors, and a popular joke had it that Moses wasn't working for them so much as they were serving under Moses.

Even more significant, perhaps, than Moses's productivity is the fact that he was one of the first people to look at New York City not as an isolated urban zone but as the central element in a sprawling region. In the early nineteen-thirties, he would charter small planes and fly back and forth across the metropolitan area to get a better sense of regional patterns. His vision of New York was of an integrated system with an urban center, a suburban ring, and a series of huge public recreational areas, all connected by parkways. Although the Regional Plan Association had proposed looking at the metropolitan area that way in 1929, Moses was the only public official who both grasped regionalism as a concept and had the ability to do something about it—which meant not only transcending local politics but also figuring out ways to pay for huge projects. He did this by establishing a series of public authorities, which allowed him to issue public bonds at favorable rates while leaving him with nearly as much autonomy as he would have had if he were running a private corporation. He moved among his various offices via a fleet of limousines—the highway-builder never learned to drive. His home base was in the headquarters of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, a small building on Randall's Island, nestled under the Triborough Bridge, where he held court in lavish offices that were hidden from public view.

It is this image of Moses—unseen, omnipotent—that dominates Caro's biography. Thirty years after its publication, the book remains remarkable both for its exhaustive research and for its almost Shakespearean scale and complexity. At the same time, it can be melodramatic ("He had learned the lesson of power. And now he grabbed for power with both hands"), and it sometimes underemphasizes the extent to which, extraordinary as he was, Moses was still a product of his time. Caro points out, for example, how many subway improvements could have been bought with the money Moses spent on highways, but in Moses's day cities all over the country were building highways at the expense of mass transit, and New York was far from the worst. Some critics, like Jacobs and Lewis Mumford, were complaining that highways damaged urban neighborhoods, but most people didn't see this until long after the damage had been done. Moses's view of "urban renewal" was no different from that of officials elsewhere, and in some ways it was far more imaginative. Moses didn't bring down New York, and he didn't single-handedly sell its soul to the automobile. Indeed, New York probably comes closer to having a workable balance between cars and mass transit than any other city in the country.

One of Caro's most damaging accusations is that Moses was motivated by racism both in his designs for certain projects and in his decisions about what neighborhoods would be given priority for new parks and pools. In an interview with Paul Windels, a colleague of Moses, Caro turns up the bizarre detail that Moses believed that black people preferred warm water and decided to use this supposed fact to deter them from using a particular pool in East Harlem: "While heating plants at the other swimming pools kept the water at a comfortable seventy degrees, at the Thomas Jefferson Pool, the water was left unheated." The essays in the exhibition catalogue go into the issue of racism in some detail but do little to rebut Caro's claims. They show a willingness to give Moses the benefit of the doubt, where doubt exists. The architectural historian Marta Gutman points out that the placement of swimming pools was in almost all cases determined by the location of existing city parks. She also confirms that the pool in East Harlem contained the same heating equipment as the others (although, of course, there is no proof that it was turned on). Kenneth Jackson makes a more general point: "The important questions, however, are not whether Moses was prejudiced—no doubt he was—but whether that prejudice was something upon which he acted frequently." Jackson argues that Moses's strong commitment to the creation of expansive public works more than compensated for his tendency to skimp on facilities for black neighborhoods. It's also worth pointing out that, no matter what planners think or do, architecture is ultimately defined by patterns of use that emerge over generations; today, Moses's pools, situated in multiethnic neighborhoods, serve entirely different communities from the ones he envisaged.

Whatever Moses's racial views, the swimming pools he built were monuments that conferred grandeur, even nobility, on their neighborhoods, and they suggest that Moses believed that the public realm deserved only the best design. In the summer of 1936, he opened one swimming pool per week. Each was architecturally notable; each was different; and the biggest ones could hold thousands of people at a time. A few, like the Crotona Pool, in East Tremont, and the McCarren Pool, in Greenpoint, were masterworks of modernist public architecture. Gutman writes that Moses managed "to integrate monumental modern buildings into the fabric of everyday urban life," and she persuasively asserts that the buildings were "unique in the United States during the New Deal."

Oddly, for all that Caro tried to destroy the myths about Moses, he never challenged the biggest one of all—that of his omnipotence. Moses is portrayed as rarely losing a political battle, but in fact he lost quite a few. One of the most important was the struggle, in the early nineteen-fifties, to extend Fifth Avenue south through Washington Square, splitting the park in two. It was as indefensible as the Lower Manhattan Expressway plan, a few years later, and Moses's inept handling of opposition to the Fifth Avenue plan from residents of Greenwich Village contributed directly to Jane Jacobs's radicalization and, ultimately, to the growing interest in preserving urban neighborhoods. In 1958, in a speech titled "Washington Square and the Revolt of the Urbs," the urban planner Charles Abrams said, "It is no surprise that, at long last, rebellion is brewing in America, that the American city is the battleground for the preservation of diversity, and that Greenwich Village should be its Bunker Hill. . . . In the battle of Washington Square, even Moses is yielding." Lewis Mumford, writing in this magazine in 1959, described the fight to ban traffic from Washington Square as "a heartening sign of the way in which a stir of intelligence and feeling not only can rally far more support than one would expect . . . but can bring to a halt the seemingly irresistible force of a group of experts and 'authorities.'" Caro barely mentions the battle over Washington Square. By contrast, he devotes three chapters to the saga of the Cross-Bronx Expressway, in which Moses trampled over the neighborhood opposition.

Caro enhances the sense of Moses's power by minimizing the influence of less flamboyant players, such as Austin Tobin, the head of the Port Authority from 1942 to 1972. Tobin managed to wrestle control of the city airports from Moses, construct a container port, expand the Lincoln Tunnel and the George Washington Bridge, and to build the World Trade Center.

When Caro's book was published, Jane Jacobs's views were on the ascendant, and it seemed reasonable to connect the city's troubles to Moses's imperious way of doing things. But Moses's surgery, while radical, may just possibly have saved New York. For every Moses project that ruined a neighborhood, as the Cross-Bronx Expressway did East Tremont, there are others, like the vast pool and play center in Astoria Park, Queens, or the Hamilton Fish Pool, on the Lower East Side, that became anchors of their neighborhoods and now are designated landmarks. Lincoln Center, whatever you may think of it, jump-started the revival of the Upper West Side; if Moses hadn't pushed it through, there is little chance that the high-rise condominiums, multiplex theatres, restaurants, and stores that now fill the neighborhood could have sprung up when they did. We are lucky, of course, that Moses's last big project, a bridge across the Long Island Sound connecting Rye and Oyster Bay, was defeated on environmental grounds, but it is difficult to imagine the New York region functioning without the Triborough Bridge or the Grand Central Parkway.

And Robert Moses got things done. In the age of citizen participation, this has become harder and harder. For more than five years, we have been fighting over what to do at Ground Zero, and the future of much of the sixteen-acre site is still unresolved. The idea of Moynihan Station—a conversion of the classical Farley Post Office, on Eighth Avenue, into an improved Penn Station—was first proposed a decade ago, and it still hasn't happened. By contrast, Moses's plan to cover miles of train tracks on the Upper West Side with an extension of Riverside Park took under three years from design to completion. In an era when almost any project can be held up for years by public hearings and reviews by community boards, community groups, civic groups, and planning commissions, not to mention the courts, it is hard not to feel a certain nostalgic tug for Moses's method of building by decree. It may not have been democratic, or even right. Still, somebody has to look at the big picture and make decisions for the greater good. Moses's problem was that he couldn't take his eye off the big picture. He was so in tune with New York's vastness that he had no patience for anything small within it. Caro brilliantly immortalized Moses's indifference to neighborhoods and people at a time when the city was weak, when the wounds from his high-handed approach were raw, and when Jane Jacobs's focus on the fine grain of neighborhoods held fresh promise. But there is a price to pay for thinking small, just as there is for thinking big. Thirty years later, we are still trying to find the balance. ♦

BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

From the Wall Street Journal.

And if history is any guide, the claiming of a scalp this large will only add fuel to a pyre that is already licking at the heels of several even better-known CEOs.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

SOUND EFFECTS

"The Situation" and a season of Ennio Morricone.

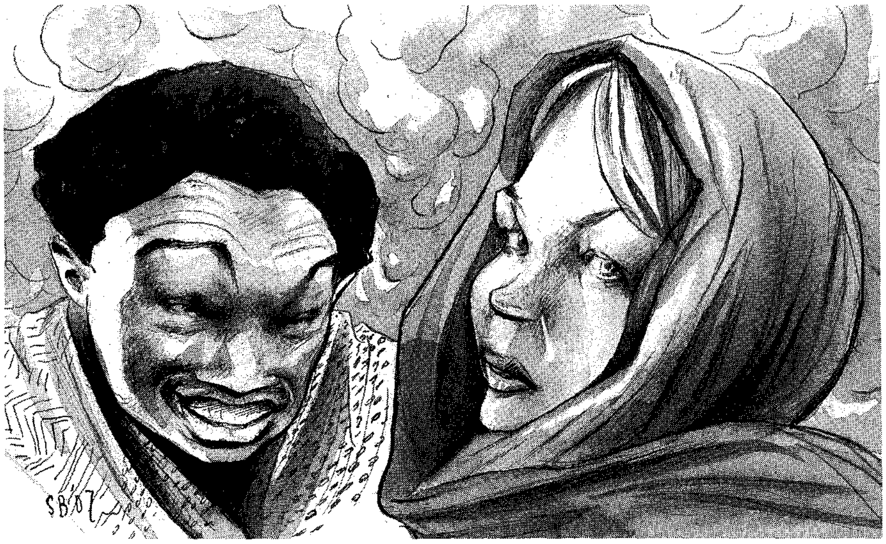
BY ANTHONY LANE

The new Philip Haas film, "The Situation," is not the first movie to consider the United States' presence in Iraq. We already have "Turtles Can Fly," a sharp evocation of life in the Kurdish territories, set in 2004. Though grim, it was brightened by a child's-eye view, and it closed with the good news—as it seemed to the Kurds—that the Americans were coming. Now, three years on, and three thousand American deaths later, good news sounds like a bad joke, or a half-remembered chimera. Such is the present-day backdrop against which "The Situation" is staged.

What it investigates is the policy—pursued by governments and clung to by private souls—of hoping against hope. In Baghdad, an intelligence officer named Dan Murphy (Damian Lewis) continues to work on the principle that hearts and minds may yet be won, swayed, or, at the very least, bought. He arranges the contract for a water-treatment plant; he talks knowledgeably of hospitals that require incubators for babies, whereas his colleague, Wesley (Shaun Evans), scoffing at such idealism, prefers to speak of "democracy by force." Mind you, Wesley wears a black bow tie with a blue shirt in hundred-degree heat, so he was clearly deranged to begin with. Meanwhile, outside the Green Zone (the phrase is starting to acquire the patina of a Thomas Pynchon setting), Anna Molyneux (Connie Nielsen), an American journalist and occasional bedfellow of Dan, picks her way gingerly through a story: Two Iraqi teen-agers fell afoul of an American checkpoint and got tossed into a river. Only one of them could swim.

We see this incident at the start of the film, and duly expect Anna to expose it; but her efforts are fitful, and our attention, like hers, is pulled elsewhere. You could argue that Haas and his screenwriter, Wendell Steavenson, have planned this deliberately, so as to deepen the impression of a country snarled up in loose ends—how can you hope to impose democratic discipline, after all, when a single dumb crime goes unsolved? If so, they are running a double risk. First, we are left with the simple suspicion that Anna isn't much of a reporter. There is a long, and by now threadbare, tradition of cinematic incursions into foreign lands being led by white Western journalists. Think of "Under Fire," "Salvador," or Volker Schlöndorff's magnificent "Circle of Deceit." In those instances, however, the hero seems as bedevilled as his destination, whereas Anna is so meek and fretful that, as a character, she is soon outgunned by her surroundings. I sometimes wonder if Connie Nielsen has quite recovered from "Gladiator." Even now, as she makes love in a hotel room, there is something stunned in her demeanor, as if Joaquin Phoenix were still nuzzling her off camera.

Second, if Haas feels no need to spin a tight yarn, that may be because he is too busy making a point. We hear it in the numbness of the dialogue, which could have been adapted from Ionesco. Listen to this exchange: "I'm sorry, it's the situation." "Everything is the situation." Or this: "Let's not talk about this for one night." "There's nothing else to talk about." Really? There is always triviality whistling around, even in battle (think of "Three Kings," David O. Russell's manic take on the first Gulf War, with its meshing of grand purpose and cheap plunder), and Haas's film tends to pick up speed only when minor characters, bearing furtive agendas, sidle into the frame. Take Zaid (Mido Hamada), an Iraqi photographer whose desire to work with Anna is less professional than shyly affectionate—they lie on a bed and hold hands. Then, there is Duraid (Mahmoud El Lozy), a bearish ex-Baathist with a wide, worldly smile. His sole wish is to quit Iraq (a diplomatic post in Australia, he explains, would do nicely), and he has information, useful to the Americans, that might hasten his departure. There is something about his calm conversation with Dan—they cradle glasses of whiskey, in the sunshine—that beautifully dramatizes the slow, corrupted steps by which civilization needs to be inched ahead.



Mido Hamada and Connie Nielsen in Philip Haas's Iraq-war movie.

That deceptive tranquillity has long been Haas's forte, as anybody who saw "The Music of Chance" or "Angels & Insects" will attest. He shot this new movie in Morocco, and the result is convincingly bleached and parched, with piebald cars spraying dust or lining up at gas stations. The combat scenes in "The Situation," however, do not represent his finest hour, or even his most exciting minute; many years could—and perhaps should—elapse before Iraq finds the director with the energy to do justice to its fissile plight. The camerawork is handheld throughout, yet Haas is not a man of natural jitters, and long after the violence—a climactic American assault on an insurgent stronghold, with Anna trapped foolishly inside—has died down, this awkward and half-digested movie gives off a melancholy reek. One of the last sights is that of Dan, surveying the aftermath of the attack. Under sunlight the color of sand, he finds the incubators he ordered, unused and abandoned. So much for new life.

As far as this year's Academy Awards ceremony is concerned, only two things are certain. One is that the evening will not be Borat-free. The other is that Ennio Morricone will be given an honorary Oscar. He will thus join one of the choicest subsets in Hollywood, headed by Charlie Chaplin and Cary Grant: the Overlooked. These are figures who have been nominated several times (five, in Morricone's case), who have never won, and to whom the Academy at last, tardily and guiltily, hands a fistful of gold. Borat can expect his forty years from now.

Morricone is a composer. There may be moviegoers, as pale as deep-sea creatures, who have seen every film that he has scored; one list puts the tally at five hundred and twenty-eight. On the other hand, no moviegoer over the age of forty will fail to recognize the waa-*wuaaah*-waa that signalled Morricone's presence in "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly." That was the third of his collaborations with Sergio Leone, a partnership that was to last from "A Fistful of Dollars" (1964) to "Once Upon a Time in America," twenty years later, and which I recently heard Quentin Tarantino, in a TV interview, hail as the greatest entwining of composer and director in the history of cinema. The spaghetti Western was nothing without its meat sauce.

By way of tribute, February is Morricone month in New York. On the third, there will be a concert of his work at Radio City, with the man himself on the podium—his first such engagement, astonishingly, in the United States. Meanwhile, MOMA will be screening six films, and Film Forum a deafening twenty-six, including some of Morricone's ventures into Americana, such as "Days of Heaven" and "The Untouchables," plus two of his projects with Bernardo Bertolucci: "Before the Revolution" and "La Luna." As for rarities, I like the sound of "A Quiet Place in the Country" (1969), which, according to the program, includes "Nymphomania, Necrophilia, Fetishism, Sadomasochism." All that *and* Vanessa Redgrave. Sounds like a job for the horn section.

It's good to be reminded that Morricone was asked to assist the bizarre and the brutal—he supplied the score for Pasolini's "Salò," an unforgiving exercise in disgust—because, like any artist who seems to summon loveliness at will, he will always risk being patronized for his facility. You sit down to watch Giuseppe Tornatore's "Malèna" (2000), and your ears know what to expect: a glorious struggle, as Morricone strives to mold harmonic shapes that can go head to head, or quaver to quaver, with Monica Bellucci. He had already transformed Tornatore's "Cinema Paradiso" into something more than itself—had stirred longing into its sweetness and thereby bound it together. The same recipe had worked, on a majestic scale, with "Once Upon a Time in America," where the movie's most plaintive theme was touched off not just by an old man gazing through the window of his boyhood hangout but also by one of his friends, filmed as a kid, scooping cream from a charlotte russe. What ignites Morricone, in other words, is less the nostalgic impulse than those pure, primal experiences which are destined to become the objects of nostalgia—the laying up of treasures upon earth.

To listen to that film is to be surprised by how careful, even sparse, the use of music is. I was under the vague impression that Morricone had been at work throughout, whereas, in fact, he likes to lie in wait. It is that seizing of moments, the shudder of sudden attention, that lifts him to the top stave of movie composers, in all their stealth and pounce. You might not connect Morricone with a work as fiery as Gillo Pontecorvo's "The Battle of Algiers" (showing at Film Forum on February 9th and 10th), which feels as if it needed no music at all; yet it bursts into a rattle of drums, as French troops, in 1957, head into the Casbah in search of their insurrectionist foes. When young Algerian boys, whipped up by a Muslim call for puritanism, set upon a drunkard and drag him down some steps, we hear three chords of crashing dissonance. Society is now primed to explode. This is Cinema Inferno, and Ennio Morricone, conjuror of the beautiful, is right there in its midst. ♦

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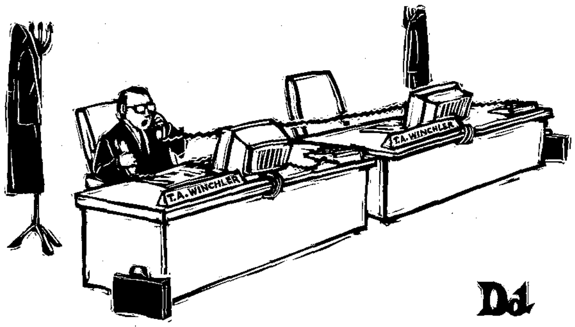
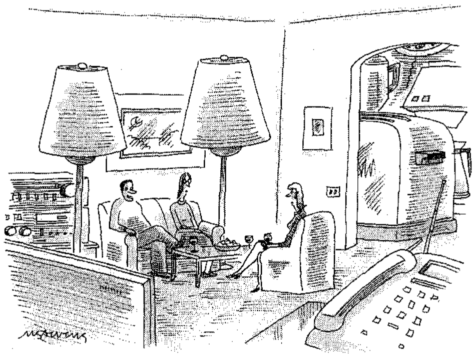
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Robert Leighton, must be received by Sunday, February 4th. Finalists in the January 22nd contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 19th & 26th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Actually, it was more of a lateral move than a promotion."
Gary Tunnicliffe, New York City



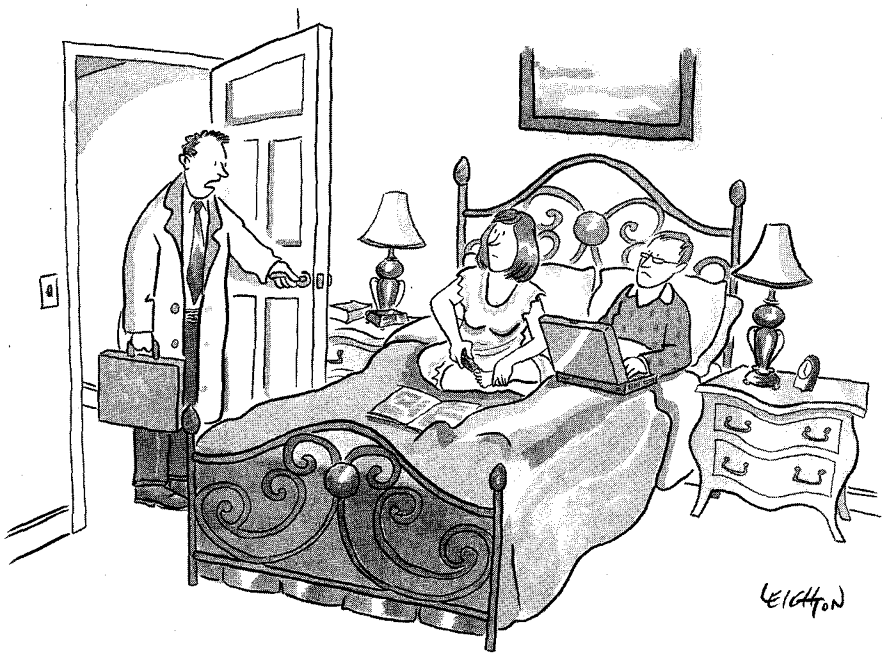
THE FINALISTS

"It's down the hall, but don't fall in."
John Gelb, Riverside, Conn.

"You know how it is—first you buy the giant-screen television, then nothing else seems to match."
Janice Sniker, Fremont, Ohio

"Would anyone like 1/68th of a piece of toast?"
Eric Weber, Tenafly, N.J.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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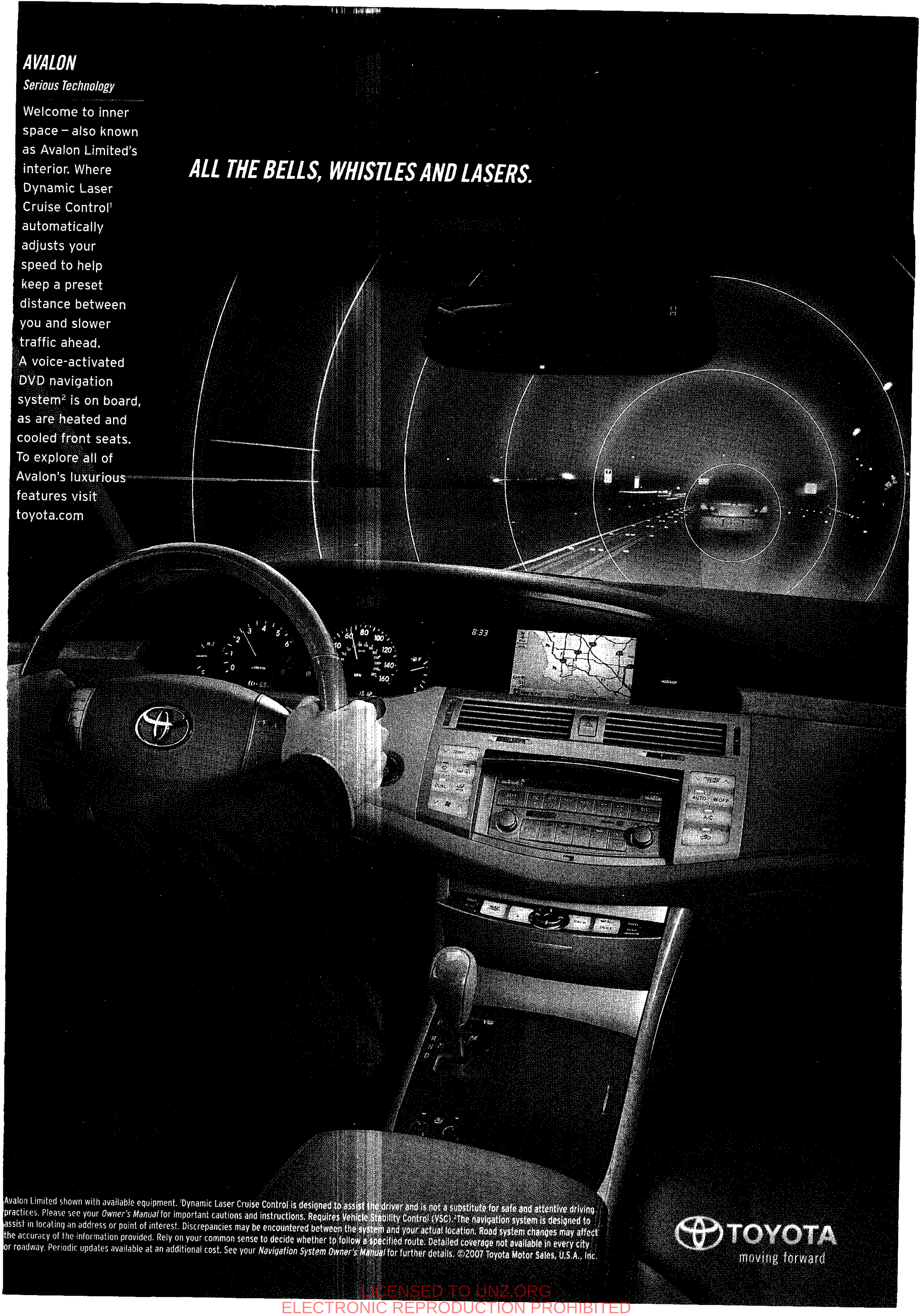

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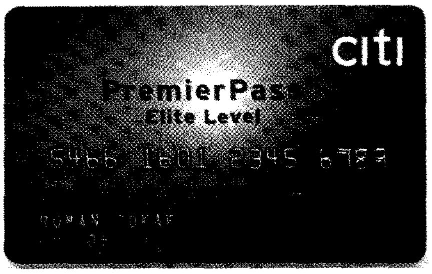
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"It's the fastest way to earn points" is in comparison to other air travel programs. Based on CompereMedia data from January through July 2006.

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